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Colonel Crockett. 99



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COLONEL CROCKETT,

THE TEXAN TRAILER.

BY CHAS. E. LASALLE.

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THE TEXAN TRAILER.

CHAPTER I.

COLONEL CROCKETT ON A BEAR-HUNT.

"I SAY, stranger, did you see any thing of a confounded big b'ar passing this way?"

The question was uttered by Davy Crockett, the renowned bear-killer of Tennessee, as, dashing at full speed through the dense forest, he suddenly emerged into a small clearing, where a big Dutchman sat on a log eating his dinner. The latter stared at the glowing hunter for a moment, and with his mouth crammed so full that he could hardly speak, he said:

"Hoo! vat you said?"

"Did you see a b'ar pass this way, a few minutes ago?"

"Vat kind of a bear vas he?"

"A black bear and a regular whopper."

"Vas he goin' py hees legs, or vas he flyin' mit his wings?"

Crockett stared at the Dutchman, as if meditating whether to bring him to his senses or not by breaking his gun over his head; but there was such an appearance of honesty in his countenance, that, despite his hurry, he paused to exchange a word or two with him.

"Dutchy, did you ever see a bear?"

"Yaw, I vos."

"Did you ever see one fly through the air?"

"Yaw—more as goot many times."

"When?"

"I see'd one only next day after yisterday. He had wings so big as never vos, and had von sheep dat he hold fast mit his toes."

Crockett laughed.

"You old Dutch blunderbuss, you mean an *eagle*."

"Yaw; vot kinds does I means?"

"A *bald-headed* eagle, I suppose."

"Yaw—dat's him; ef he *bald-headed*, den he *bare-headed*, ain't he?"

"I suppose."

"Den he eagle vot was *bare*—hooch? vot you call him?"

"Yes."

"Den he *bear* mit wings."

And the Dutchman laughed, as though he had said something extremely funny, while Crockett was amused in spite of himself.

"Vos he great pig bear, mit four legs?" inquired the Hollander, suddenly becoming serious again.

"Yes—a ring-tailed roarer."

"And he hop along so?" he continued, dropping on his hands and feet and hopping along like a frog.

"Something like that," assented Crockett.

"And his mouth open, mit his tongue hanging in?"

"Yes—yes: which way did he go?"

"Yaw; I hash not seen notting of him!"

And again the Dutchman laughed until he was ready to fall off the log, all the while cramming his mouth with food.

There was no little humor in Colonel Crockett, and the round fat Dutchman, shaking with laughter, like so much jelly, was more thén he could stand, and throwing back his head, he made the forest ring with his own mirth.

This made Hans Bungslager go it harder then ever, till finally he capsized—and tipping over the log backward, the last Crockett saw of him, as he moved away, was his dumpy legs beating the air, as he sought to complete his partial summerset so as to rise to the standing position again.

But Colonel Crockett was seeking the trail of the most enormous bear he had seen since coming into Texas, and as he had a special anxiety to secure and take it back to camp, he was fearful of losing too much time.

So, without cultivating the acquaintance of Bungslager any further, he turned his back upon him and struck into the woods, making for a point where he believed there was a good prospect of finding his prey.

I may say, to relieve all anxiety of the reader, that Hans finally succeeded in turning over on his face, and

regaining his feet. He was very nearly choking, however, from the food which had gone the "wrong way," and, when he finally recovered his self-command, and looked around for the American hunter, he had vanished like a phantom.

All this was some thirty odd years ago. The eccentric Colonel Crockett, who had served several terms in Congress, had been disappointed of a reelection, and had left Tennessee and gone off to the territory, or rather republic, of Texas, there to join the Texans who were gallantly struggling for their independence against Santa Anna, and the hordes of Mexicans that were overrunning the country.

Crockett was a born hunter, and when he reached this part of the world, he found there was an abundance of game—so much that he was tempted to linger by the way, and delay his visit to the Alamo, which was doomed to make such a wonderful struggle against the overwhelming forces that were marshaling against it.

He, with several friends, was therefore off on a several days' hunt in the wilds of eastern Texas. He had joined a party on their way to the Alamo, but while they halted at a small village some miles back, he had gone on with several others to take part in a grand hunt.

In that vast State, as is well known, are found buffaloes, deer, pumas, ocelots, jaguars, wild-cats, black bears, wolves, foxes, raccoons, opossums, rabbits, hares, squirrels, antelope, mountain goats and moose; besides, prairie-hens, wild geese, wild turkeys, brant, teal, canvas-back ducks, pheasants, quails, partridges, grouse, woodcock, pigeons, turtle-doves, rice-birds, and numerous others—to which may be added murderous Mexicans, and equally murderous and more daring Comanches, Apaches and other tribes, so that that there was a good prospect of Crockett and his friends securing all the sport that they could possibly wish.

Starting off together, they had gone but a short distance when they discovered a dozen buffaloes grazing on the slope of a hill, about a quarter of a mile distant, and the whole parted, dashed away in pursuit.

The buffaloes took the alarm, and while yet a good ways off, thundered away at full speed, leading the hunters on quite a long chase. They were in full tilt after them, when the

keen eye of Colonel Crockett detected an immense bear on his right, making for the cover of a dense tract of forest.

Davy Crockett had a weakness for bears; he had slain his hundreds in the wilds of Tennessee, and he preferred hunting them to any species of game known. So the instant he caught sight of this monster, he shouted:

"Go ahead after the buffaloes, and I'll chase the bear."

With which he turned his mustang to the right, and sped away in pursuit of his favorite prey.

But bruin had a good start, and made such good time that he plunged into the wood several hundred yards in advance of Crockett, who strained every point to catch up with the frightened brute.

It was of no avail, however, and hurrying in a short distance among the trees, Crockett found the wood too dense to continue the pursuit on horseback; and, determined not to lose his sport in this way, he leaped to the ground, hastily fastened his bridle to a limb, and continued the pursuit on foot.

His skill enabled him to keep on the trail of the bear, without trouble, until, while running at full speed, he dashed into the clearing, where Hans Bungslager was eating his dinner on the log. The particulars of their interview have been given.

In his great haste, and in dodging in and out among the trees and undergrowth, Crockett had gotten off the trail of the bear, and was hunting for it when he ran against Hans Bungslager. He knew that he could not be far from his game, and that by running across the general direction he had been following he was certain of intersecting it.

This he did, and, as he anticipated, met with success, almost immediately. Such a large animal as a bear, and especially this one, could not fail to leave a perceptible trail, which the keen eyes of Crockett were quick to detect.

The hunter was deprived of one great advantage. When hunting in the Tennessee canebrakes, he was always accompanied by a number of dogs, that were sure to "tree" their game very quickly and to afford the greatest assistance in the hunt. But now he had not a single yelper with him, and was compelled to rely on himself entirely.

Hark ! he heard the crackling of twigs and brush ahead—evidence that he was gaining rapidly upon his prey. He bent to the pursuit with renewed ardor, and, although he could not see the bear, he knew that he was close upon him.

On, on dashed the hunter, tearing through the underbrush, with scarcely a halt to turn aside, until a wild scream of agony made his blood tingle, and leaping into a small clearing the next instant, he beheld a scene so exciting in its character that it almost stopped the beating of his heart."

CHAPTER II.

IN CLOSE QUARTERS.

THE bear seemed to know that a dangerous enemy was upon his track, and was not only frightened but infuriated by the fact. In his aimless flight, he came directly upon a small clearing, in the center of which stood a log-cabin cottage, surrounded by a small patch of cultivated ground.

At the very moment of his appearance, a lithe, handsome young lady was passing across this clearing with a pail of water in her hand. Catching sight of the bear, she uttered a shrill scream of terror, that caught Crockett's ear, and ran at full speed for the open door of her cabin, while the exasperated brute, with a growl of fury, made for her.

The girl was fleet of foot, and seemed to run with the speed of the wind ; but the bear was so close upon her, that, when she darted into the door she had not time to close it behind her.

As Davy Crockett sprung into the clearing he caught a glimpse of the girl as she vanished through the door, and saw the huge brute lunging after her. As quick as thought his rifle was at his shoulder, and he blazed away at his hind quarters, so rapidly disappearing from view.

It would have been better if the shot had not been fired, for, striking the monster in the haunch, it did not inflict even a dangerous wound, and only succeeded in adding to the fury of the animal, whose rage was already at the boiling-point.

The hunter saw him twitch from the stinging pain, as, with an ominous, cavernous growl, he disappeared in the cabin, from whose interior were heard the heart-rending shrieks of the terror-stricken girl.

Crockett became desperate. His rifle was of no further use, and throwing it aside, he threw his arm back of his neck, and drew forth an awful-looking knife—a genuine Bowie, presented to the hunter by the daring little inventor himself.

“Panthers and wildcats!” he exclaimed, as he ran like a deer across the clearing; “that bear has got into the wrong pen, and ef he isn’t got out in a hurry, he’ll raise the biggest kind of a rumpus, which I rather reckon he’s doing now!”

In a twinkling, he was at the door, and without hesitation sprung within. Only a glance was needed to understand the situation.

The fair fugitive, upon reaching the interior of the cabin, had felt instinctively that there was no safety upon the lower floor, and had gone up the stairs in the corner, in a more expeditious manner than she had ever done before.

The bear evidently had not seen her, and was nosing around for her in the lower apartment. When the hunter bounded into the room, he was the very man he wanted to see and he “went for him.”

Crockett had been in a hand-to-hand struggle before with these creatures and he knew what they were. He wasn’t particularly anxious to be caught at a disadvantage, so when the brute made a plunge at him, he dodged and slipped aside, the bear striking with such force against the door that it was banged to, and the two contestants were thus shut together.

“Come up stairs! quick!” shouted the same voice that had uttered the screams. “Come quick or you will be killed! He will have you sure, if you don’t hurry!”

Now, if this same voice had only remained quiet, it is not at all improbable that Crockett might have retreated up-stairs; but, with his characteristic stubbornness, he determined to pay no heed to this appeal, while at the same time he was actuated by a suspicion that perhaps the bear might invade this retreat, and thus endanger the young lady whom he was so anxious to befriend.

"Never mind me," he called out, as he dodged to the other side of the room and kept his eyes fixed keenly upon his antagonist. "I've been in this kind of business afore, but look out the brute don't find out where you are, for I don't blame him for wanting to swaller such a purty piece."

The girl didn't appeal to him any more: doubtless she concluded she was only wasting her breath.

The lower floor, I should remark, was like the ordinary apartments of the log-cabins on the frontier. One large room occupied the lower part of the building, and here were the fire-place, closet, table, chairs and various domestic articles.

Crockett glanced at the fire-place in the hope of finding some embers there, but one look showed that the young lady had made her preparations for kindling a fire, but the light had not yet been applied; so that means of defense was thereby rendered unavailable.

But he still grasped his huge Bowie, all-potent in his hands, and he concluded it was time his formidable enemy was made to feel its point.

The bear did not permit him to remain idle long, but turning with wonderful quickness for such a lumbering animal, he reared on his hind legs, and with his red mouth open and growling voice, came in a direct line toward him.

Every thing was now to be sacrificed for defense, and catching up the table, Crockett slammed it full in the face of the bear, and then darting nimbly forward, plunged his knife half-way to the hilt in his body. He would have driven it to the handle, had not the point encountered a bone.

Having no time to repeat the blow, he withdrew the weapon, and leaped backward, just in time to escape the furious lunge of the brute. The blood poured in a stream from the frightful wound made, but the bear seemed to feel no loss of strength and to be unconscious of the hurt he had received.

A few more such blows, however, were only needed to "settle the hash" of the creature, and Crockett now endeavored to inflict them as speedily as possible, without receiving any return.

The bear was awkward in his movements, but there was also a certain swiftness that made it exceedingly dangerous to his antagonist. At the same time, his size compelled more

dexterity upon the part of Crockett, who leaped and danced about the room like an acrobat on exhibition.

Finding himself in a corner, the hunter was forced to dart so close to the bear that its descending paw grazed his back and tore off a few strips from his hunting-shirt, and a twinge or two of pain, reminded him of what was in store for him, if the brute once got him in his embrace.

Again the knife sunk deeply into the body of the bear, being driven this time from the back, and sent in with such vigor, that it produced a sensible effect upon the raging monster.

But such a mass of vitality was not easily destroyed, and for the time the bear was more furious than ever. Crockett was kept so continually dodging and leaping about, that he found it utterly impossible to get in another blow; and as he circled around the room, he was in imminent peril of being thrown down by some of the articles of furniture that were continually in his way.

Moving thus, too, he caught glimpse of a pair of eyes, peering down from the stairs, while the fair owner held a rifle in her hands as if awaiting the opportunity to use it.

"Shall I shoot?" she finally asked, in a suppressed voice, as he passed near her.

"When you're sartin of plugging him," replied Crockett, never once removing his eyes from the glowing orbs of the beast.

It was plain that if the hunter was going to escape with his life, something must be done to weaken the bear, that was pressing him so close that a collision could not be postponed much longer.

Any man who has ever met Colonel Davy Crockett knows that when fairly aroused he had a fearful temper, and was reckless in what he did. His blood was now fairly up, and he determined that he had retreated about long enough.

"Confound you!" he muttered, as he steadied himself against the side of the wall, preparatory to making his charge, "do you think I am afeard of you?"

And then uttering a yell, such as he had heard escape the throats of the Creek Indians at the massacre of Fort Mimame, he bounded toward his foe.

The bear at this minute was reared on his hind legs, with paws up. Crockett, as he reached these formidable weapons, ducked his head, so as to pass beneath them, and as quick as thought buried his knife into the side of the brute.

It was a terrible blow, and gave the creature such a spasm of pain that his paws dropped almost involuntarily, and Crockett was compelled to extricate himself in such haste, that he was unable to withdraw his knife and take it with him.

This made his situation ten-fold more perilous. He had no weapon at all with which to defend himself, and it was only left for him to await the fierce onslaught of the terrible foe. Thoroughly aroused, he was determined on recovering his knife, even though at the imminent risk of his life.

"Come up-stairs!" shouted the terrified girl, who was vainly seeking a chance to fire upon the bear, "he will kill you *now*, sure!"

"Let him kill me then!" was the stubborn reply of Crockett. "I am going to git that knife ag'in, or he's going to git me."

Believing he had a chance, the hunter made a lunge for it. He struck the handle, but he could not retain his hold, and, as his hand slipped off, he received a staggering blow from the bear, that knocked him to the floor.

A gasp of terror escaped the girl, but Crockett recovered himself and made another attempt to regain his property.

Again his hand grasped the handle, and the brute made for him. Had the hunter let the knife go, and sprung out of the way, he would have escaped easily; but, mad with rage, he held fast to it, refusing to loosen his grip, even when he felt the weight of the paws upon his shoulders.

With a desperate effort, he jerked the Bowie loose, the blood gushing after it in a copious stream. Then he attempted to pull away, but it was too late, and the two went down together, locked in a death embrace, Crockett believing that his last day had come!

CHAPTER III.

THE ALARM!

CERTAIN that the hunter was doomed to death, the fair stranger, whose own escape had been so narrow, could restrain herself no longer. With rifle in hand, she leaped down the stairs, and made her way toward the combatants upon the floor.

Colonel Crockett was in great extremity, for, in spite of the terrible wounds the bear had received, he still possessed tremendous strength, and now that he had got his foe in his arms, he was bent on giving him the "death-hug," without any unnecessary delay.

But the hunter now had the Bowie in his powerful right hand; he used it with all the strength and skill at his command. While his own face was in such proximity to the terrible snout of the wood monster, he plunged his knife again and again into his side, with a frequency and power certainly sufficient to kill any animal but a Texan bear.

Still the fearful gripe of those immense fore legs, grew more rigid each moment, until Crockett felt the breath of life leaving his body, and was certain that the walls of his breast were being caved in.

"Fire! quick!" he managed to gasp, as he saw the girl with the gun standing near them.

"I am afraid of hitting you!"

"Never mind if you do—don't wait."

Placing the muzzle directly against the head of the monster, the girl pulled the trigger of her rifle.

The most vital part of the bear was pierced. The ball went crashing through his brain, and with a sort of sigh, his great strength failed him; he rolled heavily over upon his side, and breathed his last.

As quick as a flash, Colonel Crockett disengaged himself and sprung to his feet.

"Oh, you are killed!" wailed the girl, as she sunk upon

the edge of one of the overturned chairs, "you can not live with such frightful wounds!"

The hunter was indeed a distressing object to look upon. The blood from the beast covered him almost from head to foot, and, scattered over his face, it made him look as if he had been lacerated by the claws of the brute.

"Me!" exclaimed the delighted Crockett, "I have not been harmed a bit: I've only had a good squeezing, but, I'm gradually getting my breath back again. Howsumever, I've been hugged before, and I've no doubt such a good-looking gal as you have been hugged, too. If I hadn't a blue-eyed little wife, down in Tennessee, I'd be tempted to play the bear to you."

"Oh! how can you jest at such a terrible time?" said the girl, her face blanched with terror.

"I know I ought to be ashamed of myself," said Crockett, as he looked down and realized what a plight he was in, "but it was always a weakness of mine to be joking when I hadn't oughter. If I ain't too impertinent, may I ax your name?"

"Katrina Duncan."

"Where is your father and mother?"

"I have none."

"What! you don't live here all alone?"

"Oh, no! I live with my uncle and aunt."

"Where might they be just now?"

"My aunt has gone to the village."

"That is a dozen miles away."

"The creek runs near the house, and she used the canoe. She can easily get back by nightfall."

"And your uncle—I haven't seen any thing of him."

"He is in the woods at work."

A sudden suspicion entered the head of Crockett.

"What is his name?"

"Bungslager."

"Ah! I see'd him in the woods—the jolliest Dutelman I ever sot eyes on. When do you expect—"

"Doonder and blitzen!"

Turning their heads, the two saw the very man of whom they were speaking, standing in the door. Short, fat, sturdy,

with his round, moon-like face lit up by a pair of round eyes that were the embodiment of wonder and amazement.

"What dis mean, eh? Vot hash somepody peen doin', eh?"

"You have visitors, uncle."

"Yaw, as I sees, but when my visitor brings von pig pear mit him, I vish he leaf him inside de out doors."

"He didn't bring him, uncle; the bear came himself, and this gentleman rushed in to prevent him from killing me."

"Oh, yaw, and got killed himself. I ish glad to see you," said Hans, advancing and offering his hand; "dis ish your gun vat I picks up."

"It looks like the critter," said Colonel Crockett, advancing and taking his weapon. "I see'd I couldn't make no use of it, so I dropped it and sailed in with my Bowie, and ef it hadn't been fur Katrina here, it would have been the last of old Davy Crockett."

Hans Bungslager stopped and looked at the hunter with a curious expression.

"What your name ish?"

"Colonel Davy Crockett."

"From Tennessee?"

"Exactly."

The Dutchman burst into a laugh that nearly shook him to pieces.

"You ish dat pig fool, eh, dat went to Congress and didn't know noffin. I heerds 'pout you, and dinks you de piggest fool as never vas."

This was not very complimentary to Crockett, but the good nature of Hans Bungslager was irresistible, and he laughed to see him laugh.

Katrina was somewhat embarrassed, and thought it her duty to apologize for the rudeness of her uncle.

"He doesn't mean any thing," said she, turning toward the hunter; "it's a way he has. He got some papers that told about you in Congress, and he was so pleased that he staid home two or three days, and did nothing but sit in his chair and laugh."

"He's a lucky dog to be able to laugh so much," replied Crockett, with a serious air. "I have done a good deal of

laughing in my time, but I reckon I've felt like crying as many times. Homsomever, I s'pose you want to get this carcass out the room."

Katrina replied that such was her wish, and Crockett and his host laid hold and managed to drag the huge creature outside the door. He was pulled some distance away, when the hunter, taking his Bowie in his hand, ran his finger along the edge.

"Go way with yer buffalo-steaks and venison, when I can git b'ar meat," said he, as he began operating upon it. "I'm going to stay to supper with you. I s'pose you've eat b'ar-steak?"

"Oh, yaw!" replied Hans; "I eats him once."

"How did you like him?"

"A Mexican—one greaser, gif him me to p'ison me; ef I had eat but lettles I would died; but I eat so much dat I spit him up ag'in."

"Get out! wait till I cook ye a hunk of it; you'll like it better than any sourkrout you ever saw."

Bungslager shook himself with laughter at the thought of his finding any thing in the way of food that could please his palate better than that savory article; but he stood by and watched Crockett, as he handled his knife with a skill that was really admirable.

The bear was in prime condition, and, after laying the shaggy hide back, the hunter cut out several slices that looked quite tempting, and which he asserted would tickle the tongue of any one, when properly cooked and placed upon the table.

The hide was carefully taken from the entire body, and then the carcass was rolled into the creek to float away, as being of no further use, while Crockett carefully washed the stains from his own person. Then bearing the hide over his arm, and the clean-looking meat, the two returned to the cabin.

During their absence, Katrina had improved the time to the utmost. The furniture, except where irreparably injured, had been placed to rights, the floor scrubbed up, and the fire kindled, and every preparation made for preparing a meal.

Looking at the bright, cheerful room, one could scarcely believe that a few minutes before it had been the scene of such a frightful contest as I have described.

When Crockett explained his wishes, the really charming, rosy-cheeked girl yielded her place to him at the fire, and he commenced the preparation of his bear-steaks. The savory odor soon filled the room, and placing some fresh butter and snowy bread upon the table, the three sat down to their meal.

But they were doomed to an interruption. The first mouthful was not yet tasted, when through the open door the figure of a young man was seen approaching, walking with a rapid stride across the clearing.

As he came nearer, it was easy to see from his blanched face and excited manner, that he was the bearer of some important and alarming tidings.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FLIGHT.

THE individual who was seen hastening across the clearing, showed in his actions that he was an acquaintance of Bungslager and his niece.

"Well, Sebastian, what is it?" asked the latter, while the quick flush that overspread her face told Colonel Crockett at once what relation existed between them. Even in that moment of excitement the young man had time to cast one admiring glance upon the maiden.

"I've bad news! the worst news!"

All turned away from the table and looked expectantly toward him.

"What is it?"

"Three runners reached Brownston, a couple of hours ago, with the news that a big war-party of Comanches are approaching!"

"Ish dat all?" exclaimed Hans, with a sigh. "I dinks my cow has tumbled over a log, and hurts herself."

"But they will be there by to-night."

"Does my frow know it?"

"Yes; she besought me to hurry to you, and urge you to come at once, without a moment's delay. As soon as I learned it, I prepared to come, although several urged me against it, as they thought I would be intercepted before I could get back; but I have made all haste."

"From what p'int are they coming?" asked Crockett, who had the sense to perceive that this was a serious peril that threatened the Dutchman and his niece.

"From the north-east," replied Sebastian, turning toward Crockett, who had risen to his feet.

"How do you know that they intend attacking the village?"

The young man looked at the hunter a moment without replying.

"I suppose you are a stranger in these parts, for if you wasn't, you would know that Brownston has been attacked several times before, although never by such a large force as now threatens it. A good many of our men are off in the Texan war, and a good many more are going; but, we've had so many of these raids by the Comanches, that we've got used to them. We're better prepared than we used to be."

"Do you think the village is in danger itself?"

"No," was the prompt reply. "As we have been warned, I do not see as there is any danger at all."

"Then if we can get *there*, we shall be safe?"

"Undoubtedly."

"It is about a dozen miles away," added Crockett, in a voice which showed he was considerably relieved; "it ain't likely that the red-skins will be there before night."

"No; we do not fear for Brownston itself, now that we have been notified, but it is the outlying houses, that are in such danger, and quite a number of the folks have gone out to warn them."

"Then let's set down and make a meal on b'ar-steaks, and all go to the village together," setting the example, by taking his place at the table again.

The coolness with which this was uttered had a most reassuring effect upon the others. Sebastian, (as the young Texan was called,) was a volunteer in the war of independence of the Lone Star State, and was home in his native village of

Brownston for a short time to see his friends, when this alarm reached his ears.

Knowing full well the ferocious character of the Comanches, and that in their wars, they made no discrimination between Mexican, Texan or American, the tidings filled him with the gravest alarm, concerning the beautiful Katrina and her uncle.

He was glad to find a guest there whose appearance showed him to be a man of knowledge, skill and daring, and who could not fail to prove a most valuable auxiliary in escaping the peril which had descended so suddenly upon them. He advanced and offered his hand.

"I am Sebastian Carsfield, a Texan, fighting against Santa Anna. I am glad to make your acquaintance."

"And I am on my way to the Alamo," replied Crockett, warmly shaking his hand.

"Then we are brothers: I join you at the meal."

"I dinks you ain't so much hungry as I vas," said Hans, who was quite impatient at the delay, and who attacked the viands with renewed appetite. Katrina was so flustered by the exciting news and the presence of her lover, that she became quite thoughtful and ate very little.

Crockett seemed to have forgotten entirely that such a thing as a hostile force was threatening them, and joked and jested in his usual manner. He related many of his adventures in Tennessee, in hunting bears, and some incidents of his eventful career in Congress, and his memorable tour through the northern States.

In this way the afternoon wore rapidly away, the dinner was lengthened, and by the time that the party rose from the table, the latter part of the day was half gone.

As the "frow" of Bungslager had gone to the village of Brownston in the canoe, there was no means of making the journey by water, so it was arranged that the dozen intervening miles should be made overland. Hans owned a sturdy horse, not very fleet, but tough and enduring, upon which he proposed to load every thing necessary, while he and Katrina walked.

Sebastian had come on foot, not pausing to procure a horse, and Crockett offered to yield his mustang to her, as the animal

was at no great distance, and he intended to procure him before setting out for the village.

But she declined. None of the party were more able to walk than she, and in the labyrinths of the woods, she had more confidence in her own limbs than in those of any quadruped or biped.

It was agreed that Crockett should go after his mustang and then follow a bridle-path that he could easily find, which struck the creek about a mile below the cabin of Bungslager, and there await the coming of his friends. At the same time Sebastian was to descend the river some distance below, to see whether any thing more could be discovered regarding the Comanches, and then was to return to the point mentioned, where it was believed that all would rendezvous at the end of a couple of hours.

With this understanding the parties separated—Crockett taking the trail made by the bear, while he was pursuing it, as the speediest way of reaching the point where he had left his mustang tied. Sebastian located the bridle-path with such exactness that he was certain of finding it without any delay.

The Texan, with his heavy rifle slung over his shoulder, strode off in an eastern direction, following the course of the creek. As he looked up to the sky, and saw how near the sun was setting, a shade of anxiety crossed his face. He felt that they had lingered too long in the cabin, after the danger became known. It was now impossible to get fairly started for Brownston, before night was closing in, and the probabilities were that the place would not be reached before daylight.

These hours of darkness would be hours of the greatest peril to his friends. He had no doubt that the vigilant, ferocious Comanches would be between them and the village before the night was half gone. Such a large party could hardly hope to make their way through the lines without discovery—especially with the blundering Hans Bungslager, who seemed incapable of comprehending the grave character of the danger that menaced them.

"I am afraid we shall see the worst kind of trouble, before many hours come and go!" muttered the Texan, as he strode thoughtfully through the forest.

CHAPTER V.

A SLIP OF THE MEMORY.

COLONEL CROCKETT was also equally thoughtful. He felt that a mistake had been made through his agency, and that the gravest consequences might be the result.

"Them b'ars have always got me into trouble," he muttered, impatiently. "I s'pose if I git into a fight with a greaser and a b'ar comes along, I'll leave him and put for the b'ar."

He had easily found the trail of the brute, and kept it without trouble. The way back seemed much longer than when he was pursuing the beast with so much zeal; but he traveled very fast, and reached the open prairie before the sun had set.

In one hand he carried his long, reliable rifle, and over the other was hung the huge shaggy hide of the black bear. Its size and character made it too valuable for him to leave until it could become dried, and so he took it to make sure of having so valuable an article.

Reaching the edge of the prairie, he found that his mustang had managed to disengage his bridle and was cropping the grass near at hand. Crockett was on the point of emerging from the woods, when his quick eye detected something out upon the plain.

Scarcely a half-mile distant, and almost precisely upon the spot where he had left his companions to pursue their buffaloes, he saw fully a hundred mounted Comanche Indians.

"By hokey-pokey!" muttered the hunter, as he stood and watched the sight, "that means business, sure enough!"

The band of red-skins seemed to be holding a sort of council. They were gathered in a large circle, the heads of their horses pointed inward, while a dozen or two on foot stood in the center, apparently debating together upon some proposed scheme, while their devoted followers were waiting until their leaders were ready to give their orders.

Colonel Crockett stood almost fascinated at the sight. The Comanches were fine-looking men, gayly dressed in bright colors, all mounted on magnificent horses, and, as is well known, they are among the finest horsemen in the world. Sitting as motionless as carved figures, they would have formed a capital scene for a painter.

The question that naturally occurred to the hunter was whether these made up the entire force of Comanches that were marching against Brownston. If they did, the town being forewarned, certainly had little to fear from them; but the settlers who dwelt in the surrounding country were as powerless to resist this band, as though all the red-skins west of the Rio Grande should descend upon them.

Crockett felt that time was important, and that he endangered the safety of others by waiting; but, he was so anxious to watch their movements that he determined to wait awhile at least, and try to discover their intentions.

His experience among the Creek Indians had given him a good knowledge of Indian character and ways, and he was not long in understanding that was a sort of council—those in the center of the large circle, having all to say in the matter.

Crockett first carefully approached his own mustang, and securing him, sprung upon his back, and then held himself in readiness to flee in case the red-skins should turn their faces toward him.

Some fifteen minutes passed in this painful suspense, when a simultaneous shout arose from the group, and they were seen turning their horses about, and brandishing their weapons about their heads.

The conclusion had been reached!

The Comanches were now ready to march!

And just at this moment, Colonel Crockett became aware that the faces of the Indians were turned toward him, and their horses were galloping at full speed directly at the point in the wood where he stood.

"Be sure you're right, then go ahead," growled Crockett, as he wheeled his mustang about, "and I think it's right for me to kick gravel."

The proximity of the trees was such that, as I have shown

before, the hunter dismounted and continued the pursuit on foot; but now, under the influence of fear, his mustang seemed to shoot in and out among the trees like a swallow in its flight.

"I wonder if they see'd me," muttered Crockett, as he ducked his head to avoid being swept off his horse or having his head swept off his shoulders. "I don't think they did, or they wouldn't have sent so many after me. Howsumever, maybe they've heard that I am a member of Congress."

Unconsciously Crockett had turned the head of his horse toward the path, for which he ought to have searched, and his horse suddenly plunged into it, and wheeled off to the right, and followed it at the same headlong speed.

This made traveling a great deal easier, and the mustang plunged along at a really swift gait, his rider every now and then casting his head around, in the expectation of catching a glimpse of those fearless dogs yelping upon his track.

"If they can ride through this wood any faster than me," exclaimed Crockett, as a limb knocked his coon-skin cap from his head, "then I'd like to stop and see them."

He kept up this break-neck pace for some time longer, and hearing nothing of his enemies, he paused and listened. The sound of a leaf that rustled through some branches overhead and fluttered down upon his shoulder was all that reached his ear, besides the hurried breathing of his animal.

"Sartinly if they war coming I'd hear them," he concluded, after listening for a few minutes, and every thing was still as the grave.

Dismounting from his mustang, he knelt down and placed his ear upon the ground. Had there been horsemen anywhere in the neighborhood, the tramp of their feet would have been heard, but to his surprise Crockett heard nothing at all.

"There's one thing sartin," said he, "them Comanches ain't on my trail, so I'll give the hoss a little rest."

With which he drew his animal down to a moderate walk.

By this time it was growing dark, and despite the speed with which Crockett had ridden, he was yet a great deal behindhand, on account of waiting to watch the movements of the red-skins. He ought to have been at the rendezvous long before this.

Al through the tumultuous excitement Crockett had clung to his bear-skin with almost the tenacity that he grasped his rifle. He had done it almost unconsciously, even after his cap was swept from his head.

He was on the point of starting ahead again when his quick ear detected something suspicious. The sound was very slight, but such as it was, it convinced him that there was some one coming along the path.

Not knowing what it meant, the hunter drew his horse aside out of the path, and then waited and watched. The obscurity was so great that he could not see very distinctly, but in the gloom he discovered two men, who passed by on a rapid run. He could see that they were Indians, and that they were moving very fast.

What struck Crockett as singular was that these red-skins were pursuing the opposite direction from him. Either they must have passed by the rendezvous toward which he was hurrying, or they had gone dangerously near it.

"What does it mean?" the Tennessean asked himself, beginning to feel a little puzzled at the action of the red-skins; "these are queer critters—these Comanches—they don't do business like the Creeks and Choctaws. Now, how did them two rascallions get round on t'other side of me? They couldn't have passed me in the path, for I was riding too blamed fast."

He returned to the path again, and, as his horse walked along, he thought seriously upon the situation of himself and friends.

Suddenly he started.

Could it be that there was another band of Comanches on the other side of Hans Bungslager's cabin? Or were these scouts who were scouring through the country in search of victims, and having discovered the flight of the fugitives, had they made all haste to the main body that the whites might be cut off before there was a chance of escape?

The more he reflected upon what he had seen, the more serious alarm did he feel. It was not for himself that he feared, but it looked to him as though the gentle Katrina Duncan was in greater danger than she or her friends imagined.

He continued riding forward, his horse on a moderate walk, until in the moonlight he caught the glimmer of water ahead, and he knew that he was drawing near the rendezvous.

Feeling it his duty to be suspicious on all occasions, he dismounted again, and fastening his horse beside the path, crept stealthily forward and looked about him. The creek was broad and deep, but he saw no person or boat visible.

Where was Sebastian? was the question he asked himself, as he looked furtively about. "Can it be that those two Comanches have slain him, and his dead body is somewhere at hand?"

He stood irresolute a moment, debating whether to begin the search or not, when a low, cautiously-uttered whistle reached his ear. Suspecting that it was a signal from some Indian to another, he stepped further back in the shadow, and cocked his rifle, determined to shoot the first red-skin that showed himself.

The whistle was repeated, and finally Crockett ventured to answer it. He had scarcely done so when a figure appeared in the path before him whom he at once recognized as Sebastian, the Texan.

The two met and clasped hands in the moonlight like old friends.

"Where are they?" was the first whispered question of Crockett.

"I do not know; I have seen and heard nothing of them since I left there this afternoon."

"How long have you been here?"

"Over an hour. What kept you?"

The hunter gave a concise account of what I have already made known to my readers, and then asked him his experience.

"I reached here as quick as I could, after leaving you," replied the young Texan, "but the boat I expected to find here was gone, so I went down the creek about a mile, where I found it caught in some bushes."

"How did it get there?"

"It must have got loose and drifted down there; I remember the prow only rested against the bank, and it might have done it very easily."

"Have you seen any of the Comanches?"

"Not one," replied Sebastian.

"That's blamed queer," muttered Crockett; "there's a strange look about things that don't suit. What can keep Bungslager?"

"He may be in trouble—"

"Hello! there he comes!" interrupted Crockett, as he saw the pürsy form of the Dutchman emerge from the wood, leading his horse that was heavily loaded with his domestic utensils and food.

The two men stood until he advanced to where they were, and then with a blanched face Sebastian asked the question:

"Where is Katrina?"

Hans Bungslager turned about and looked at the back of his horse a moment, as if in a maze of perplexity, and then exclaimed:

"DOONDER AND BLITZEN! I FORGOT HER!"

CHAPTER VI.

ALL WRONG.

"I forgot her!" exclaimed the astounded Sebastian; "how did you do that?"

"I dinks at first she drops off de hoss—but afore I starts she goes back to look fur de cow, and I forgits about her till I gots here, and den I dinks, 'cause you ax me."

"This is a serious business," said the young Texan, turning toward Crockett. "I think Bungslager is a little the biggest fool I ever saw. It won't do to go on to the village and leave the girl alone in the woods."

"I rather guess not—specially when she's such a purty piece of calikar as that. I'd be very glad to go back arter her, but, as she'd be a blamed sight gladder to see you, and you'd be gladder yet to see her, why I ain't the man to interfere."

The Texan coughed, and pretended not to comprehend the meaning of Crockett, hastily replying :

"Suppose, then, you and Hans go on toward the village, while I go back after her."

"I'm agreeable."

"The path follows the creek all the way, and Hans has w traveled it often enough to know it, so you won't be delayed on that account. Good-by and good-luck to you!"

"'Bass," called out Hans, as he saw the young man start off.

"Well, what is it?" was the quick, business-like response.

"You goes arter Katrina, eh?"

"Yes; I do not propose to desert her."

"Ef she hain't found te cow, you can help her looks for him, and den you drives her into de village, and we has prote and milk for supper."

"We'll see to that," replied Carsfield, who had no wish to dispute with the Dutchman, "but, of course, I will look after Katrina first."

"Yaw; te cow has got a bell on her neck, so dat it will be easy fur to find her and den—"

He paused as the young man had vanished in the wood, and turning back to Crockett asked :

"Do we waits here till dey don't come, or do we don't go on till arter dey don't come?"

"I think so," replied Crockett, not exactly certain whether his answer was any more luminous than the question itself.

"Yaw; dat ish all right—I allers dink so."

"Sebastian advises us to keep on toward the village; we won't be able to travel very fast, as your horse has got about ten wagon-loads on his back, and if you're going to ride on top, he'll have to set down and rest about every hundred yards. So they will overhaul us, afore we can reach the village. Are you going to ride your hoss? If not you're welcome to straddle mine."

"No; I rides my hoss—you see he expects me, and I dush not disapp'ints him."

"All very well," replied Crockett, "but how the hokey-pokey are you going to get on top?"

the "I shows you."

Hans Bungslager, as I have said, had his horse so loaded down that he was almost invisible. The pillow-bed "lapped" on each side so much that his head and a little of his neck could be seen. On this was placed another bulging tick, while numerous articles were adjusted and balanced with a skill which showed that the delicate hand of Katrina had borne a share in the task. These necessarily projected from the side of the horse, but she had remembered that the path they expected to follow was quite narrow, and the "breadth" was principally upward.

Having walked to this point, Hans concluded that he was entitled to ride, and indeed in loading his horse, care had been taken to arrange the articles so as to make him a nice comfortable seat.

Hans displayed his innate sagacity by leading the horse beside a short stunted tree with a projecting stumpy limb, upon which, with considerable "boosting" by Crockett, he managed to climb, and then, thanks to the gentleness of his horse, he safely "located himself upon his back."

"Now I ish ready," he called out, hitching about a little, so as to make sure he was firmly seated; "drive ahead."

Crockett pressed forward, and in the gloom saw a well-defined path before him, running parallel with the creek. This was the one referred to by Sebastian, and he took it at once.

Hans Bungslager succeeded in riding his horse better than would have been expected. By keeping in the center of the path, the trees and shrubbery at the sides did not interfere with his movements. The only difficulty was that by being elevated so much, he got his face pretty well scratched and occasionally was compelled to duck and dodge rather vigorously.

Crockett's native humor now and then manifested itself, when he turned about and saw the ludicrous figure in the rear; but, at the same time, he could not help feeling that they were threatened by a danger so serious that it ought to demand their entire thought.

The sky was clear, and the bright moonlight here and there penetrated through the-tree-tops, lighting up the path

and occasionally giving birth to frightful grotesque figures, that to a man's excited imagination would be apt to assume the form of reality.

But Colonel Crockett had been through too many trying scenes to be frightened by shadows. He dreaded not them—but he did dread the Comanches, that certainly could be at no great distance, and through whose lines it would be very difficult to pass in order to reach the village.

Had his own convictions been acted upon, the whites would not have attempted to make the settlement at all. In the dense woods which surrounded the cabin, there were any number of places where they could have concealed themselves, and waited until the danger had passed; but others had the right to decide upon their course of action, and his generous nature would not permit him to forsake them so long as they were in peril.

The two horses walked silently through the wood, the only sound being the faint clump of their feet, and the rustling of the shrubbery against the baggage of Hans Bungslager. Occasionally he spoke to Crockett, but not often, as the Dutchman, reckless as he was, could not fail to see that it was no time for conversation.

So they progressed for a mile or so, when Crockett suddenly heard a furious gasping.

"Whoa! doonder and blitzen! whoa."

Checking his own horse and turning his head, he could see that Hans was in trouble. His obedient animal had instantly stopped upon being appealed to, but he was still in difficulty.

"What is it?" inquired the colonel.

"Doonder! dish limb has cotech my nose under de shin, and I can't gets my neck loose. Back!" he commanded to his horse, that, moving back a step or two, enabled him to free himself from the snare into which he had run his head.

"Can I help you any?" asked the hunter, who was not certain whether he was still in trouble or not.

"Yaw; you can help me as never vas."

"How?" asked Crockett, springing from his mustang, and hurrying back beside him.

"You goes pack to de capin, and up stairs in my room,

under te bed, yer finds some bear-grease ; if you rubs dat on my chin here I feels goot."

"I'll see you hanged first," growled the hunter, as he hurried back to his horse. "If you ain't the greatest Dutchman in Texas, or the United States, then I'll go back to Tennessee and run for Congress ag'in."

Had there been no one beside himself and the Hollander concerned, Crockett would not have attempted to keep him company ; but the beautiful Katrina, and the gallant young Texan had already won a warm place in the heart of the grizzled adventurer, and he was willing to incur any personal risk for them. As it was, he saw that, under Providence, all depended upon his watchfulness, and he therefore determined to assume the part of master, so long as he was compelled to keep company with Hans.

Nothing of Indians yet.

Crockett had scarcely thought this, when he heard the reports of three guns in rapid succession, but a short distance to the right of them in the wood, and not a little startled, he reined up and listened, Hans from necessity being compelled to do the same.

They waited five or ten minutes, when, hearing nothing more, the journey was resumed, Colonel Crockett feeling a conviction that some sort of trouble was at hand.

A hundred yards or so further on the horse of the hunter stopped, and leaning forward, the rider saw that the path divided, a branch turning off quite sharply to the right, while the other kept almost directly ahead.

Being an utter stranger, of course he appealed to Hans.

"Which do we take, the right or left ?

"De right," was the instant reply.

"You're sartin of that ?"

"Yaw."

"Then we will go ahead."

And the famous Tennessean acted upon the motto, which has been quoted so many times, both during and after his life, his animal walking forward in quite a lively, business-like fashion.

Crockett began to think that it was time the young Texan and his lady-love put in an appearance. He felt a longing for

the society of such a daring, chivalrous young man, as he knew Carsfield to be, and he thought that at the tardy rate pursued by him and Hans, the two fleet-limbed lovers ought to be somewhere in the vicinity.

But fully another mile was now passed and nothing was heard of them. Once again the report of a gun had been heard, but this time it was in another direction, and so far away, as to be quite a relief. Neither of the alarms had come from the rear, so there was no reason to fear that Carsfield and Katrina were in any difficulty.

"I say, hilloa!" suddenly called out Hans, in the husky, eager tones of one who is alarmed and excited. "I say, hilloa!"

"Wal, what's the matter, man?" inquired the hunter, reining up his mustang until the horse of the Dutchman could approach no closer.

"I hash sumfin' to dells you."

"Let me hear it then."

"It ish a good joke."

And thereupon Hans began shaking with laughter, until it really seemed as if he would fall from the back of his animal. He made several attempts to speak, but before he could make himself intelligible he broke off into immoderate laughter again. Finally Crockett lost patience.

"You can stay there and laugh, while I go on."

"Hold on! hold on, Mister Crockett—ain't it fooney—but I made—haw! haw! haw!—one great mistake—haw! haw!—*dish is de wrong path, and we're funder away from de settlement dan when we shtarted! haw! haw! haw! haw! haw! haw!*"

CHAPTER VII.

JOURNEYING UNDER DIFFICULTIES.

HANS BUNGLAGER certainly had a remarkable appreciation of a joke, and although something like anger rose in Crockett's breast at the thought of the stupid mistake that had been made, he could only grin and wait in silence until his outburst of merriment was ended, when he inquired:

"Are you sartin that we ain't right after all?"

"Dish ish de path dat goes round, and come back of my house shust in front of it, and if we keeps on, te cabin will run ag'inst us."

"Then we may as well turn back."

Crockett guided his horse carefully around the other so as still to hold the lead, and after considerable trouble, Hans succeeded in imitating him, and the return was begun.

It is never a very pleasant thing to find you have taken the wrong road, and Colonel Crockett felt somewhat ruffled that his companion should have misled him; but, after all, he did not see as any thing was lost thereby.

He felt very grave doubts in his own mind of the wisdom of this attempt to reach the settlement, when it was as good as certain that the Comanches were ahead of him. At any rate, there was no wisdom in seeking to do so, supported only by Hans Bungslager.

Sebastian was as keen and skillful as he was brave. He was intimately acquainted with every crook and turn of the forest-paths, he had fought Comanches and Mexicans, and some reliance could be placed upon him in an emergency like this.

Pretty Katrina was far more valuable in the hour of danger than was her thick-headed uncle; and by turning back, there was the probability of joining them the sooner, provided they had not already come up and passed the point where the two paths joined.

This seemed so probable as to cause Crockett considerable

misgiving, and he turned about to make a proposition to the Dutchman.

"You're so heavily-loaded, Hans, that it won't be safe for your hoss to undertake to git up a trot, if he was able, which I don't believe he is. So I'll gallop on ahead to meet the folks while you take your time. Are you agreeable?"

"Yaw."

Without waiting for any thing further, Crockett struck his mustang into a gallop, his hoofs sounding upon the earth with a dangerous loudness, when there was such necessity for silence in all their movements.

A few minutes only were necessary to bring him back to the main path, where he looked keenly about in the gloom for some sign of his young friends; but none was to be seen, and he heard only the sigh of the winds and the soft flow of the creek.

Had they already passed?

The question was so important that Crockett thought himself justified in taking rather imprudent means to answer; so he galloped some distance down the path, and then reining up, shouted:

"HILLOA!"

He repeated the call several times, and his voice echoed among the trees with a startling force, but no welcome response came back in the shape of a signal from Sebastian. Then he dismounted from his horse, and advancing to where the moonlight shone upon the ground, carefully scrutinized it as an Indian does when looking for the signs of the passing of a foe.

But he was unable to detect any thing at all, and so he retraced his steps to the "junction," convinced that the lovers were still between him and the cabin.

"Whoa! whoa! Doonderation! Why you don't shtop!"

As these excited words reached the ears of the hunter he became sensible of a furious tearing forward of some animal, and while he was looking up the path to see what it meant, the horse of Hans Bungslager came forward on a trot, that threatened to displace every thing upon her back, and jolting the rider like so much jelly.

"Whoa! shtop him!" he called out, seeing Crockett.

"What's the matter?" asked the latter, with a laugh, as he turned his horse so as to head him off.

"He got scared at a pig bear back in te woods, and I can't shtop him."

The animal was certainly frightened at something, and instead of stopping before the obstruction placed in his path, he shied sharply to the right. Hans was unprepared for this movement, and he rolled over to the other side, bringing himself to the ground, with the feather-bed upon top of him. Leaving him to disengage himself as best he could, Crockett made a dash for the horse just in time to catch his bridle.

"Doonder blitzen!" muttered Hans, as he staggered to his feet, "what made you shtop de hoss so *chook up*?"

"That's the only way I see'd to do it. Are you hurt any?"

"I dinks I am," replied the Dutchman, as he began feeling of different parts of his person, "I prokes my pipe, and I bu'sted two buttons off my coat behind, and I feels pad all over of myself."

"If you will take my advice you'll strip off all there is on this hoss."

"Vot I does shmit it?"

"Leave it here till you kin come back and get it; if you keep it on the horse, and try to get it into the settlement, you'll lose it and your scalp, too."

"Can't lose my skelp, 'cause I hain't got none to lose," replied Hans, lifting his hat and showing his pate, white and shining in the moonlight.

Crockett urged his proposition, and his comrade seemed quite struck with it. He debated and hesitated awhile, but finally consented, and, as the horse had become soothed and quieted by this time, he stood still, while the different articles were taken from his back.

They were carefully deposited under a large tree, standing back some distance from the path, and then Hans remounted his animal and took the reins in his hand.

By this time, Crockett began to feel some apprehension about the lovers, who ought to have been on the spot before this.

He made numerous inquiries of Hans, but learned very

little. The stolid Dutchman seemed certain that it was all well with both of them, and that there was no cause for anxiety about either.

"Sebastian—he so smart de Injins can't coteh him."

"But Katrina?"

"She so purty dat nobody never didn't hurt her, and so nobody won't never say nottin' to her—so she's all right."

"She's never had a pack of red-skins chasing her," replied Crockett, who was any thing but satisfied with the situation of things.

"Dat is why dey won't do it, den, no more."

"But, why are they hanging back so?"

"Dey ain't hangin' pack—dey hang forward. I dinks Katrina ish lookin' fur de cow, Sebastian ish lookin' fur Katrina, and te cow ish lookin' fur me, and we ish lookin' fur all dem, and so we all keeps lookin'—yaw! yaw!"

"It seems to me we may as well wait here till they come—there ain't any other way they can get to the settlement is there?"

"Yaw."

"How?"

"Dey kin go down into Mexico, and den come round frough de Mulf of Gexico, and come dat way—but den it ish funder dan dis way isn't?"

"Is there any other straight path?"

"Dey kin go on t'oder sight de creek."

"I didn't know there was another path. Just as like as not they they have taken that and are several miles ahead."

"I don't dinks so."

"Why not?"

"'Cause we hain't heard de cow-bell—dat go jinglo-jingle."

"Let's go ahead, for I don't see any use in waiting here."

The hunter felt some impatience at the belief that he had dallied away so much time, when it was more than probable that the parties for whom he was waiting had long since passed by on the other side.

Accordingly he started his horse along the path again, Hans Bungslager following close in the rear.

"So his animile was skeared by a b'ar," mused the Tennes-

seen, as he rode along and recalled the fright of the horse ridden by his friend. "I wonder if he was as big a critter as I shot yesterday? If he was I'd like to get a shot at him."

He held up his rifle in front of him, as he passed through a small patch of moonlight, to make sure that the priming was in good condition.

"She's allers ready," he mused, as he still held it. "I don't like Injins, and I do like b'ars, and I'd a blamed sight rather shoot one of the four-footed than one of the two-legged critters, and if one should come 'long just now—"

"Hilloa!" called Hans again, in an unusually cautious voice.

"Well, what now?" asked Crockett, turning his head; "don't speak too loud."

"My hoss is skeart ag'in."

"What by?"

"I dinks dat bear ish follerin' me," replied Hans, looking affrightedly over his shoulder.

"Where is he?" was the excited demand of Crockett, who thought no more of lovers or Indians. "Do you see him?"

"No, but I hears him valk, and the hoss he don't like it; I dinks he pig bear or else he be Injin dat is trying to shtearl me."

"I guess it's more likely to be a red-skin than any thing else," replied the Tennessean, instantly becoming very circumspect in his movements, "and whichever it is, I've got to use my gun on 'em!"

CHAPTER VII.

HEMMED IN.

WHEN young Sebastian Carsfield started in quest of Katrina Duncan, it is not to be supposed that he would permit any thing to delay him on the way.

The fact that she was alone, at such a dangerous time as this, was enough to give wings to his feet, and in a short time he crossed the clearing and stood in front of the cabin from which they had departed a few hours before.

The thought that possibly there might be some of the Indians here caused him suddenly to check his steps and spring back to the cover of the wood, where he stood for several minutes carefully scrutinizing the building and listening.

All was still, and satisfied that none of the Comanches had yet reached the spot, he advanced boldly, and, drawing the latch-string, entered. All was dark and quiet within, and he called the name of his beloved several times without receiving any response.

"She has not returned from looking after the cow," he concluded, as he came out of the building again, and looked anxiously around, uncertain what way to turn.

The thought that possibly danger threatened the house, caused him to leave the cabin, and, passing across the clearing, take shelter in the shadow of the wood, where he could watch without being watched in return.

He recollected that a cow of Hans Bungslager generally wore a bell, the better to indicate her whereabouts in the woods, and he listened in the hope of detecting that. Once or twice he fancied he heard the *tinkle, tinkle*, but it was so faint that he could not locate it, nor make certain that he was not mistaken.

In the mean time he was growing more anxious. Time was of the utmost importance to him; there was little doubt in his mind but that all these exposed houses of the settlers would be visited by the Comanches, who moved with wonderful celerity, and struck blows as quick and powerful as they were merciless.

"Surely she will return to the building," he concluded, referring to Katrina, "and finding her uncle gone, will hurry on after him. Then what could have caused her delay?"

He was in this distressing anxiety when he started as he saw a couple of figures advance from the wood, at no great distance from where he was standing, and start directly across the clearing toward the house.

A second glance only was needed for him to identify them as Indians—Comanches who had left their mustangs somewhere near at hand, and were paying this visit to the cabin.

The Texan watched them as eagerly as a cat watches a mouse, and at the same time he was filled with the gravest apprehension about Katrina, for this proved that the location

of Bungslager's cabin was known to the Comanches, and it looked very probable that she had already fallen into their hands.

The two Indians walked at a leisurely gait, and upon reaching the cabin, knocked at the door, and in the stillness he could distinctly hear the words, in broken English :

"White man, let brother in."

Then they knocked again.

"Poor Injin come long way—he tired—white brudder, let him come in—won't stay long."

No response being made, one of the savages lifted the latch and entered, and as a matter of course, was not long in discovering that the cabin was deserted. The moonlight, too, told the story of precipitate flight, as the red-skins could see that their coming had been expected and prepared for.

Learning that much, there was nothing left for the Comanches to do, except to come out again. Carsfield could see them very distinctly, standing side by side, and the guttural mumble of their voices was plainly audible, as they discussed some point in their own tongue.

The Texan supposed it was as to whether they should burn the building or not. He made up his mind that if they attempted to do it, he would shoot the one who made the first move, relying upon his knife and pistol to deal with the other.

As it was, by changing his own position somewhat, he could get both of them in range, and he nervously grasped his rifle, asking himself whether he should make the shot or not. Two considerations only restrained him.

It was probable that a large body of Comanches were within call, and that the shot would be the signal for them to swarm to the spot. If Katrina were still wandering somewhere in the woods, her danger would be greatly increased, and so he held the shot which, had he fired, would have changed the whole course of succeeding events.

For something like fifteen minutes, the red-skins occupied their position, and then they walked away with the indifference that had characterized their coming.

Carsfield had fought these daring marauders before, and it was a great trial for him to permit them to walk away

unmolested when he had it in his power to punish them so well for their temerity.

"However, they have spared the cabin, and if they will go and stay away, I shall not trouble them," he muttered, as he lowered his piece, and wondered what the next development was to be.

All at once he heard the tinkle of the cow-bell!

It was unmistakable, and he started up, his heart fluttering with fear and hope, for he concluded right away that Katrina was driving the cow home, and the departing Indians had not got far enough away to miss hearing it.

Fortunately it was from the opposite side of the clearing, from where they disappeared, and it was approaching.

"She will soon be here," he added to himself, as he advanced to meet her; "the unsuspecting creature has no idea of the danger that threatens."

It never occurred to the Texan, in his excited condition, that he was the one who ought to be suspicious, inasmuch as the sound of the cow-bell had broken upon his ear too suddenly to have been caused by the gradual approach of a cow.

He was too desirous of meeting Katrina Duncan to observe those "points," which at another time, would have been certain to have roused his alarm.

The bell showed that the wearer was close to the edge of the wood, and from some whim which he could not explain himself, the young man stepped back into the shadow and waited for the cow to appear.

Fortunate indeed was it for him that he did so, for he had scarcely taken refuge in the shelter of the wood, when a tall, sinewy Comanche stepped into view, and in his hand he held the identical cow-bell that had struck so pleasantly upon the ear of the lover!

The latter could scarcely repress an exclamation of amazement as he witnessed this, for he had not the remotest thought of any such strategy as it signified. The Indian had been the first to discover the cow, and after killing her, the bell had been taken from her neck with the purpose of using it as a decoy in drawing the owners on to their destruction.

Could it be possible that Katrina had taken the alarm in time?

This was the question, Sebastian asked himself, as he narrowly watched the dusky dog who was attempting this piece of shameless deception. Dark as was the prospect, he began to feel some hope that such might be the case.

Like a true lover, he believed the mental abilities of his favorite unequalled by any one else, and taking lesson from the stupidity of her uncle, she might have detected the nearness of the Indians before they discovered her.

While these thoughts were passing through his mind, he was watching the movements of the decoy. With the jingling bell held in one hand, and his rifle in the other, he walked across the clearing, turning his head expectantly toward the cabin, as if expecting some response from that. He even circled entirely around it, and then as if disgusted with the failure of this enterprise upon his part, he, too, took his departure into the woods, and the Texan was once more left alone.

Alone and wrought up to a high pitch of excitement. Several hours had already passed since the departure from the cabin, and the party of four was separated into three companies, hardly one knowing where to look for each other, and not more than one understanding how great a danger menaced them.

The young man was naturally filled with the greatest anxiety to do something for his beloved, and with a desire to get the rest away from the perilous spot, but his hands seemed really to be tied.

He could only stand still as it were, and see the procession go by without taking part in it.

To add to his discomfort, he now began to be haunted by the thought that she had already discovered her danger, and had followed after the party, starting at such a time as to miss him.

So strong did this conviction become, that he had decided to do the same, and make *that* point clear, when his acutely sensitive ear caught the sound of a footstep directly behind him.

It was so soft and stealthy, that he was certain at once of its being made by an Indian, and he sprung behind a tree to protect himself.

"*Sebastian, is that you?*"

There was no mistaking *that* voice, and, trembling with joy he moved forward in the gloom, calling out, in a fond but cautious voice:

"My own Katrina, where are you?"

"Here, right before you."

And the next instant she was clasped in his arms.

"Safe and unharmed!" he exclaimed, as he kissed her cool forehead. "I was in despair about you."

"Where are uncle and Colonel Crockett?"

"Gone on toward the village."

"And why are you here?"

"Do you suppose I could desert *you* when in danger, my dearest one? Have I ever given you cause for such a suspicion?"

"No, dearest Sebastian; but what shall we do?"

"Let us follow them at once."

"We can not take the path, for I tried to do so twice, and each time was forced to turn back."

"Why so?"

"The Comanches are watching for us there!"

CHAPTER IX.

A GLEAM OF HOPE.

"If that is the case," said the Texan, "we must take a roundabout way to get out of here. The Indians seem to be getting plentier every minute."

"You must be careful about making any noise, for you know what keen ears they have."

"Never fear about me," replied the Texan; "keep close and walk quietly as I do."

They began stealing around the edge of the clearing in search of another path very rarely traveled, and which, it was reasonable to suppose, was unknown to the Indians. They had taken scarcely a dozen steps, however, when the young man heard a rustling footstep just in front of him, and instantly stopped.

The next second he discovered several figures coming toward him, and self-preservation made him wheel on his foot so rapidly, that it was impossible to avoid making a little noise.

Slight as it was it caught the ear of the Comanches, one of whom uttered a "woofh!" and moved rapidly toward him.

"Run for the house!" exclaimed Sebastian to Katrina, when he saw the shape affairs had assumed; "hold the door ready for me, and I'll follow in a minute."

There was no time for hesitation, and the light footed girl started for the house, running as she did when pursued by the ravenous bear. Discovery was inevitable, and the instant she emerged into the moonlight, two Comanches, repeating the "woofh!" dashed out after her.

But a lion appeared in the way, in shape of the Texan, who, brandishing his terrible Bowie over his head, leaped in front, with a regular screech of a yell, and made a murderous lunge with the weapon at the nearest Comanche, who dodged it with the nimbleness of an athlete.

Sebastian made a sort of back-handed sweep at the other red skin, who avoided the blow with the same astonishing dexterity, and drew back to a respectful distance.

This demonstration on the part of the Texan had the effect of checking the rush after Katrina, who continued on her way, without pausing, until, reaching the cabin, she dashed in, and holding the door, so that she could close it in an instant, looked out upon the thrilling scene.

While the defensive, defiant attitude of the brave defender kept the two Comanches from him, it did not "neutralize" their abilities by any means. They too had knives, but the two together were not the equal of the Bowie, in the hands of the wiry Texan; but their voices remained to them, and the two set up some whoops and yells of such a peculiar character, that the young man knew at once that they were intended as signals, and they would be certain to bring others speedily to their assistance.

So he began retreating toward the cabin, walking backward, and presenting a defiant attitude to his enemies, who, following close, still permitted a safe gap between them and him.

Now and then the Texan threw a quick glance over his shoulder, to make sure that none of the treacherous red-skins were stealing upon him. He was within a rod or so of the house, when he saw what he dreaded.

Some half a dozen Indians were hurrying to the spot, coming almost directly from the rear, so that, if he remained where he was, he was quite sure to be surrounded, and cut off entirely from reaching the house.

Such a thing would have been madness upon the part of Sebastian, who instantly turned, and ran at the top of his speed toward the house, both parties of Indians converging in swift pursuit.

Katrina was on the look-out for him, and the instant he reached the door, it was drawn open to admit him, and then closed as quickly. She was prepared for such a crisis as this, and swift as came the Comanches, by the time they threw themselves against the door, the massive fastenings were in their place, and it presented as immovable a front to the assault, as the side of the cabin itself.

There was only one window upon the lower floor, and as soon as the Texan was certain of the door, he ran to this, reaching it scarcely a moment too soon; for the head and shoulders of a sinewy Indian were already through the opening.

The next minute, the body of the savage dropped back to the ground, as limp and lifeless as a log of wood.

The Bowie-knife had done its work!

This decided repulse of the Comanches had the result of making them more cautious. The whole party, numbering nearly a dozen, scattered like a covey of partridges across the clearing until they reached the wood, where they gathered together to consult how this fearful man was to be routed out and their fallen companion avenged.

Sebastian gazed after them and saw one of the men as he skarried away, bearing the body of the victim upon his shoulders.

Confident that they would speedily return to the assault, the Texan stationed himself in the lower room, rifle in hand, ready to pick off the first savage that exposed himself, while Katrina went to the upper story, which, having a window upon each side, gave a better outlook than from below.

As yet, the lovers had scarcely exchanged a word since entering the building, except that he gave a few hurried directions, during the first five minutes. The common danger was too great for wooing and winning at such a time.

The respite now granted by the Comanches gave the young man a little time to collect his thoughts and take in the "situation."

When he came to reflect upon what he had done, the conviction came to him that a mistake had been made. By taking to the woods, he could have vanquished the two red-skins who attacked, and then got away with Katrina in the darkness before the others could come up. Thus clear of all danger, and in the protecting shadows of the wood, he could easily put her out of the reach of her foes before the dawn of morning.

But what had they done?

Nothing less than shut themselves in the cabin, where the red-skins, if they chose to wait, could "gobble" them up at their leisure.

Sebastian reflected that there was not a mouthful of food in the house, nor a drop of water, as it had been cleared of both, before the principal furniture was removed. If the Indians chose to remain where they were for a few days, their prey would drop like ripe fruit into their hands.

But suppose, as was most probably the case, that they did not intend to make a siege, what then?

There was only a single gun in the house, while there were so many on the outside, Indian ingenuity could devise a safe means of getting so near the cabin, that it would be about impossible to use this or any other weapon, and then they could go to work, make their preparations and burn down the structure.

As to the prospect of a rescue, the Texan saw none at all. There was no military force at all in this part of the Republic, and of those who were able to reach the settlement, it was not to be supposed that any would venture out, while there was any reason to believe the Comanches were anywhere within striking distance.

The situation was desperate at the best, but like a brave man he had no thought of surrender, so long as he had a hand

to raise in the defense of himself and of her who was dearer to him than his own life.

Fully an hour passed, and not the slightest sign of an Indian was seen. Sebastian grew tired of watching alone, and ascended to the upper room to join Katrina.

The moonlight which entered the different windows, made it quite light here, and he saw her at once as she came forward to meet him. He pressed her to his heart, and imprinting a kiss upon her cheek, led her back to the window at which she was standing when he entered.

"We are in a bad fix," he said.

"There is hope, I trust."

"I can not see any, or very little at least."

"Will they not leave after such a repulse?"

"I see no hope of it."

"They are moving very rapidly, and will not linger long in this neighborhood. You know the Comanches go as quickly as they come."

"Not always; we have slain one of their number, and they will get even with us if possible. If they can manage to put me out of the way, I have no doubt they will be satisfied to take you and go."

"Oh, Sebastian!" she exclaimed, in a reproving, tender voice, "why do you speak so lightly of so terrible a thing? Do you think I could live after your death?"

"I don't doubt your love, dearest, and I shall stay here and fight to the death for you; but, at such a time as this, there is nothing to be gained by shutting our eyes to the truth."

"And you think the chances are against our escape?"

"Decidedly so; indeed, I see no prospect at all. I would rather fight fifty Mexicans than a half-dozen of these Comanches. They are so nimble, that it is the hardest thing in the world to hit one of them, and they know how to strike out for themselves, and have got ten times the courage of a greaser."

"And have they no mercy?"

"Mercy! I should like to see a red-skin with such a thing as mercy. I have never come across one as yet. I am only sorry that I didn't pitch into those two fellows, and then take to the woods with you, before the others came up; but, as it is, we must fight it out to the bitter end with them."

Katrina started.

"Oh, I have thought of something!" she exclaimed, in an eager and glad voice.

"What is it?"

"I think I see a way of escape."

Her tones and manner showed that she was in earnest, and a slight flutter of hope came to her lover at the thought.

CHAPTER X.

A STRANGE DELIVERANCE.

THERE was contagion in the manner of Katrina, and her lover wondered very much what she could mean. She replied by leading him to the window and pointing toward the edge of the woods, opposite to the side upon which the Comanches had retreated.

"I see nothing," he said, "except the cellar, where your uncle has been in the habit of keeping his potatoes and cabbage."

"That's just what I want you to see; for there is our means of escape—at least I *hope* so."

Sebastian looked at the girl in amazement.

"I don't understand you; if you have any thing to tell me, Katrina, don't speak in riddles."

"What I have to ask is this; if there was any way by which we could reach that mound, do you think we could get off unobserved from there?"

The young man scanned the hillock of earth very closely for a few moments.

"It might be done," he replied, a moment later. "I notice a lot of bushes just back of it, which seem to reach almost to the woods."

"They do so entirely; they are currant bushes, planted by me several years ago. They reach entirely to the forest."

"Under their shadow, one might manage to steal to the woods. At any rate, I think I could do it; but why talk of

such a thing?" he asked, somewhat impatiently, "when from here to the potato cellar, the ground is as hard and level as a floor, and they could see a cat stealing along."

"Between the house and the cellar there is an *underground communication*, which uncle Hans made last summer. Why he did it I can not tell, but I have been through it several times."

Sebastian sprung to his feet in delight.

"Is it possible? Why didn't you tell me of it before? We will try it at once; we will make it a success."

"Suppose the Comanches come before we get away, will they not be likely to find out where we have gone?"

"Possibly they might. Suppose you go first, and I will keep watch until you are ready for me."

Another difficulty presented itself at this point, although it did not amount to a great deal. The door which opened above-ground into the cellar, was on the side toward the house, and opening outward, would be pretty certain to attract the notice of the vigilant Indians.

"How thick are the walls?" asked Sebastian.

"They are lined with boards."

"They can be easily displaced, I have no doubt, and, as we shall have to make a new opening, I will go into the cellar with you."

"Let us do so then without any delay."

The Texan concluded to make a survey from each window before going, and he did so, scrutinizing every part of the clearing and wood with all the care possible.

It seemed to the Texan that perhaps the Comanches while waiting had gained the idea that the defenders of the house were off their guard and asleep; so, to prevent any action from any such presumption, he fired his gun toward the wood, and then reloading his piece turned to Katrina.

"I don't think they will disturb the house for some time; let us go at once."

Down-stairs they went, and then into the cellar beneath the lower floor. Here, of course, every thing was of pitchy darkness, and Sebastian was led by the hand by Katrina, who was familiar with every step of the way.

The passage leading from the main cellar to that where the

potatoes and cabbage (their bulk generally being too great to admit them beneath the house) was about thirty feet in extent, and its excavation must have caused Hans Bungslager a great deal of labor.

As they walked through the cool passage, both were compelled to stoop quite low to prevent striking their heads; but the passage required but a few minutes, when they came within the large cavern-like opening used for storage-room, but which at this season was almost empty.

"Well, here we are!" said the young man. "There's the door, for I can see the moonlight shining through it, and right opposite is where we must dig ourselves out."

"Will it not be safe to use the door? I am afraid it will delay us too much."

"It is running too much risk; I think we can shortly dig our way out."

Groping around with his hands, he speedily got hold of the planking, and only a little exertion was necessary to draw it loose. Then nothing but a mass of soft earth was between them and the outside.

The Texan used the plank as a shovel, and driving it into the earth, speedily loosened so much that an alarming yawn occurred—much larger than was anticipated and such that both were afraid it would attract the attention of their enemies.

They paused and listened, but, hearing nothing, Sebastian cautiously peered out. Every thing was quiet, and he could not see any evidence that suspicious eyes were turned upon them. Then telling Katrina to wait until he reached the wood, he as carefully drew himself out, and lay flat upon the ground.

Fortunately he was directly beside the vigorous currant bushes, which interposed an effectual screen against the observation of those upon the other side, while its heavy shadow gave him enough obscurity to prevent his being seen by any foes from the other direction unless their attention was especially directed to the spot. Both were dressed in dark clothes, and their hearts beat high with hope.

Sebastian had replaced his Bowie down his back, and holding his rifle in his left hand, he began the perilous journey.

He had almost fifty feet to travel, and he did it with the skill of a veteran scout of the plains—creeping along foot by foot, pausing and listening and looking on every side of him. As he neared the somber and welcome shadow of the wood, he was strongly tempted to hasten his progress, and had he been alone he might have done so.

But the last yard of the dangerous trip was made with the same deliberation and care as the others. He breathed more freely when he passed the clearing, but his anxiety still remained, as Katrina was yet to follow.

She had kept her eyes fixed upon his form, so long as she was able to see him. At times his progress was so slow or was checked that she feared he had been discovered; but, when about in despair, she could see that he was moving again. By and by her strained eyes failed to identify him in the gloom, as he gradually receded, and she could only conjecture when he got to the wood. She listened for some signal, but hearing none, concluded every thing favorable, and then she began her task.

As may be supposed, Sebastian stood in the edge of the wood watching her movements with an intensity of interest which can scarcely be understood. He could see her as she emerged from the cabin, when the same shadow that enveloped him, hid her from view, until she had advanced quite a distance along the path.

"If any Comanche wants to commit suicide, let him interfere with her," muttered the Texan, as he stood with rifle in hand, watching her progress.

But fortune favored them. The red-skins were indeed keeping a watch, but it was a watch upon the house, in which, of course, they supposed the whites were still at bay.

Katrina accomplished the whole distance in safety, and, a length, entered the wood, rose to her feet and stood beside her lover.

"Thank Heaven!" he exclaimed, as he clasped her in his arms. "I was in an agony of fear until this moment."

"We are not safe yet," she whispered, looking affrightedly round in the darkness, "they must be somewhere near us."

"Come on," said the young man, taking her hand, "I think we can avoid them."

Instead of making directly for the path, he led her by a circuitous route, and struck it at a point a couple of hundred yards distant.

From this place they moved stealthily forward, and soon found that it was free from their foes. They advanced with great care, and not until they had gone fully a half-mile did they converse with any thing like freedom.

"I think we are safe from *them*," said the young man, somewhat exultingly, referring to the red-skins whom they had left behind them.

"How long will they wait there?"

"Perhaps they will stay a day or two in the hope of starving us out, or they may make an assault in force and discover the trick that has been played upon them."

"And then what will they do?"

"Set fire to the cabin and leave."

"I suppose so," replied Katrina with a sigh. "It is sad, but I am thankful that we are not included in the ruin."

"How was it you kept out of their way so well, before we met?" asked the Texan, with some curiosity.

"I was searching for the cow, and I was not long in finding her dead, killed by a bullet. Then of course I knew the Comanches were close at hand, and I hurried to the house to warn uncle Hans of his danger, but found he had already gone. As he had a heavy load on the horse, and could move only very slowly, I knew I could overtake him, whenever I wished to do so. So I remained to see what the Indians were going to do.

"I felt able to keep out of the way, and was doing so, when I thought I saw you. I managed to approach near enough to be sure, and I made myself known, and you know the rest."

"Yes," replied the lover, squeezing her hand in his. "I know the rest indeed. We have been spared by Providence, and have made a remarkable escape from the beleaguered cabin. The Comanches are still abroad, and there must be many of them between us and Brownson; your uncle Hans is not the sharpest woodman in the world, but I trust that when we all get together, as I hope we shall speedily do, a way will be opened for all of us to reach a place of safety."

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE WOOD

It will be recollected that Colonel Crockett and Hans Bungslager were left under the conviction that a bear was close behind them in the path, and that the Tennessean, true to his instincts, dismounted and started back rifle in hand in quest of the game.

"I dinks I goes, too," muttered the Dutchman, as he slid off the back of his beast. "I would rather fight mit a bear, den haf te hoss run away mit me, and catch a limb under my chin, and take off my head off—yaw, dat so."

Hans held his gun in hand, and he resolved, if he could gain the chance, to shoot the bear in advance of his companion. He thought it would be a good joke to play upon him.

So as Colonel Crockett, moved stealthily along the path, the corpulent Hollander did the same to the best of his ability; stepping so lightly and rapidly, that it made it quite a task for him, and he puffed and panted like a tired dog.

"Confound it!" growled Crockett, turning his head. "Can't you keep still?"

"Dat ish what I is doing," was the reply. "I doesn't make no noise."

"You will frighten away the game."

"Dat ish a lie—"

"'Sh! there it is."

Hans caught sight of something dark, moving along the path, and instantly raised his blunderbuss and fired, narrowly missing taking off the head of Colonel Crockett in front of him. He did not strike the object, or come anywhere near it, but he produced a response, like a six-pounder.

"There! that will do; we don't propose to hurt you."

It was the voice of Sebastian, the Texan, and, as may be supposed, was a surprise and delight to the others.

"Where did I hit you? In te head, or in te heart?" inquired Hans Bungslager, wiith some so'icitude.

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"It is hard to tell precisely where I was hit," was the laughing reply; "at any rate, I am not dangerously hurt, as far as I know. Your slugs struck in the tree overhead like a hail-storm."

"Where ish Katrina?"

"Here she is, uncle," replied the buxom girl herself, hurrying forward, and giving the old fellow a good embrace and kiss.

"You must be more careful," said Hans, in an impressive voice. "S'pose I hit you, instead of Sebastian? You couldn't stand it petter as he does."

"We were very careful; how could we do differently?"

"Te next time dat you ish coming in front of us behind, you must come on peforehand and tells us dat you ish comin'—den we knows it, and we no shoot de next time. Understand?"

"Yes," replied Katrina, in a dazed sort of way, as she turned and took the hand of Colonel Crockett, who was heartily glad to see her.

"We were gittin' a little anxious about you," said he, as he warmly shook the hand; "we heard the noise of guns and there was no telling where the varmints war, or what they was doing. I've fout the Creek Injins under old General Jackson, and I've fout Old Hickory himself in Congress, and got licked by him too, so you can see I've been through some purty rough scrimmages in my time; but they say these Comanches are a little worse than all, and that being the case, you can understand why I'm so glad to see you."

Katrina modestly thanked him, while the Texan gave a brief summary of their experience during the last few hours.

The question now arose as to what course should be taken by the fugitives. Crockett believed that an attempt to push on into the village would result in the capture of the entire party, while to stay where they were would be equally fatal, as there was the strongest evidence that the Comanches were very near them.

Indeed, the wonder was that they were unmolested at that very moment, for some of the red-skins had passed over that very spot, and how the whites had escaped detection and capture so long was a mystery to Crockett.

"I ain't particular what we do," said he; "I only know we've got to get out of this part of creation."

"Let's go on further, any way," replied the Texan, starting on foot, with Katrina.

"Where ish te cow?" suddenly inquired Bungslager, just after he had laboriously climbed back upon his animal.

"We couldn't bring her very well," replied the Texan; "I think she will wait where she is till we come back."

"Dat is goot ash never vos," replied the contented Hollander; "she wash always a goot cow and shtood shtill, only when she kicked te pail over, and dat wash every time we milked, 'ceptin Sundays, when she kicked te pail and me over bofe."

The young man being thoroughly acquainted with the path, and having fought Comanches before, very properly took the lead, Katrina following close behind him, while Crockett came next, and Hans Bungslager brought up the rear.

In this order they started, and, as the horse of the Dutchman was relieved of his bulky load of furniture, the party progressed at a good pace, and without any unusual clatter or noise.

Stupid, thoughtless and reckless as Hans Bungslager naturally was, with his love for fun and jollity outrunning every thing else, he still had a perception (such as it was) of the danger that menaced them all, and he showed a spasmodic discretion at times.

His little pony, as fat, round and well-preserved as himself, seemed to comprehend the situation, and walked along with a steady, quiet step, that was not heard as often as the quicker and more nervous tread of Crockett's mustang. Hans himself was still, a rather unusual thing for him.

Once or twice he started up a whistle, without thinking, but he suddenly recalled himself to his senses, and preserved his peace as well as the others.

He was subject to one annoyance, rather curious in its way. Every now and then a conviction came over him that something was following him. Sometimes he fancied that a Comanche was stealing on tip-toe, with tomahawk in hand, ready to hurl it at his bald pate. More than once he turned his head suddenly, expecting to confront the ugly phantom, but

It seemed to whisk out of sight before he could fix his vision upon it.

Then he was certain it was a huge black bear, lumbering along, and only waiting for the opportunity to leap upon the haunches of his horse and claw them both to pieces.

This was curious, as Hans Bangslager was one of the least imaginative of men, and was rarely troubled with nightmare or phantoms of the brain, but the feeling followed him like his own shadow, and would not be shaken off.

He determined to wait until sure of what it was, and then to turn suddenly and shoot it. There was no danger now of hitting Katrina, Sebastian or any of his friends, for they were all in front of him. It must be an enemy beyond all question, and therefore it was his duty to put a ball through it at the very first opportunity.

The party had gone some distance, when a light was observed in the sky, of so lurid a character, as to show that there was some large conflagration.

"See what we have escaped," whispered the Texan, as he turned to look at it, and ventured to press the hand of the girl beside him.

"Have they found out that we have fled?"

"Perhaps so, and perhaps not; they wouldn't hesitate to roast us in such a bonfire, if they could only get the opportunity."

"It is then our house that is burning?"

"There can be no doubt of it. There is no other building near it, and the light is in precisely the same spot. It is good-bye to your home now."

"Uncle Hans will mourn its loss, but how can I, when Heaven has been so merciful to me?"

"He will have to build another; *you* will not!"

"But I will assist him."

"But there's a little cottage in Brownston, already finished, around which the honeysuckles and woodbine clamber, that is to be *your* home."

As the lover spoke, he leaned over in the darkness, and kissed the cheek that was not turned away from him.

Beyond the danger and darkness that enveloped them both, he saw the rainbow of hope. There was a sky all sunshine

that was only a short distance away, and with the darling beautiful, loved Katrina by his side, there was nothing that could cloud or make him unhappy.

Hans Bungslager saw the light, but he had no suspicion that it was his own building that was on fire, else he would not have been so quiet, as he rode upon his horse.

The whites paused but a few moments, when they resumed their journey, moving with the same caution that had characterized their actions from the first.

They were rapidly nearing a large clearing, where stood another settler's house, and where there was reason to fear that some of the wandering Comanches had made their appearance. No light in the sky betrayed the work of the torch, but that was no proof that the destroyer was not there that minute.

The Texan gave a word of caution to those in the rear, and when the lighting up of the spaces between the trees tokened their approach to the clearing, he requested all to remain still while he advanced and made a reconnoissance.

This was done, and he stole along as softly and timidly as when making his way from the cabin of Hans Bungslager.

Reaching the clearing, he saw the settler's house, standing as quiet and undisturbed as though no danger had ever threatened it. No sounds were audible, but there were no lights to be seen. Sebastian came to the conclusion that the owner and his family had taken the alarm in time and had fled to Brownston.

Still it was important that no mistake should be committed, and he made his reconnoissance complete, by advancing up to the very house, and even peering into the interior. The result confirmed his first impression. There were no whites in them, and he returned to his friends with his report to that effect.

CHAPTER XII.

A STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE.

THE Texan having rendered his report, the party made ready to move on again, when a rather alarming discovery was made.

Hans Bungslager was nowhere to be found!

There stood his horse, as quiet and unconcerned as though nothing extraordinary had happened, but his rider was missing.

What did it mean?

This was the question which the three asked each other, and which no one was able to answer.

"He came up and talked with us a few minutes, while you were gone," said Katrina, who was more alarmed than the others, "and then said he would go back and get on his horse so as to be ready to start if all should prove right, and that is the last we saw of him."

"Did he say nothing about going away?" asked the Texan.

"Not a word."

"What did he talk about?"

"Nothing in particular," said Katrina, trying to recall his words.

"I remember," put in Colonel Crockett, "that he said that he believed something was follerin' him—either a bear or red-skin."

"That makes it look serious," remarked Sebastian, in an undertone.

"Why so?"

"Because probably something was following, and that something has been the means of his disappearance."

"I don't see as there's any thing in that," added Colonel Crockett, "for he talked the same way when you and Katrina came up."

"Exactly, and he was right, for we were in his rear, and he detected us."

"But what could it be?" asked his alarmed niece. "No

Indian could have come anywhere near without our detecting him."

"Not unless he wanted us to do so ; then it would have been easy enough. I tell you," added the Texan, more earnestly than ever, "I believe there has been some sharp trick played upon us."

Carstfield was firm in his belief, but he could give no definite conjecture as to what the trick he referred to really was.

"I have had dealings with the Comanches before," he continued, "and when they go to scheming and playing at strategy, they are a little the sharpest fellows I ever saw."

"But I can see no object in this," said Katrina. "Uncle Hans is not such a tempting prize that they should steal him and leave us."

"That is it," laughed Crockett ; "when *you* are here, any red or white man would pass by us for *you* ; you are right, Katrina."

"That is not what I meant," the blushing girl hastened to say ; "but he is the last man, as I look at it, that a party of Indians would seek to capture."

"Our turn, *your* turn, my dearest one, will soon come. They have experimented on him ; they have succeeded so well that their next attempt will be upon us."

The words of Sebastian struck both Crockett and Katrina as full of meaning, and they began to believe that he was right, although the whole thing had a look which neither of the three could explain or understand.

When the Comanches were in such force, that an assault upon the whites could not but result in their capture or destruction, it seemed incredible that they should take the pain and time to work by artifice ; but by what other means could the disappearance of the Dutchman be accounted for ?

"How was it done ?" asked the perplexed girl, who was in a tremor of anxiety about her uncle.

"That is a question which can only be answered by a guess," was the reply. "I think one of the red scamps has followed us some distance, and showed himself in some way or in some shape to Hans, so that he has been led to follow after and attempt to capture him, and that's what he's after now."

This at best was a very unsatisfactory explanation, and it did not suit the originator of it himself.

"Must we leave him to his fate?" asked the girl, scarcely able to restrain her tears of sympathy; "must he be left to perish?"

"I dislike the idea of leaving you again," replied Sebastian, "when we are all in such danger; but, if you wish it, I will take the back track, and make a short hunt for him."

"Oh! do," pleaded Katrina, taking one of his hands in both of hers and pressing it; "do it for my sake. Colonel Crockett will wait here with me, won't you?"

"Surely—any thing to please you," was the gallant reply. "I think, howsumever, that it is all time lost."

But the affectionate girl would hear no refusal, and the Texan prepared to obey.

"You must promise me that you will not leave this place, and that you will not fire again unless you have to do so to save yourself," he said, addressing himself to Colonel Crockett, who, of course, gave the promise.

"You are now standing in the path," added the Texan. "Perhaps it will be safer to withdraw a little to one side, so as to be out of the way of any that may come along."

This was a good advice, and was acted upon at once. Crockett led the horses some distance into the woods and fastened them to trees, where they were beyond the sight of the keen-eyed Comanche, and then their friend took his departure.

Katrina was in a tremor of alarm, and seating herself beside the Tennessean, wept like a child. The grizzled old soldier did his best to comfort her, but there was little he could say to soothe her alarm, and so he let her have her cry out.

When something like a calm came back to her, it struck him that something ought be done by way of diverting her attention from the gloomy subject.

"Let's go to the edge of the clearing, and see whether any of the varmints are about?"

She arose, and the two advanced to the open space, where the low, broad deserted cabin could be seen, standing as quiet in the moonlight as when they first cast eyes upon it.

"Hallo ! there's something now !" whispered Crockett, touching the arm of the girl, "and by the hokey-pokey, if it ain't a big bear !"

A large lumbering animal could be seen, shambling awkwardly over the clearing near the house, as though he were searching for something to eat.

The great bear-hunter impulsively raised his gun.

"What are you going to do ?" she asked.

"Just wait a moment, and see how nice I will drop that chap."

"No ; you mustn't," she interrupted, drawing down his arm. "Remember the promise you made to Sebastian."

"But he didn't mean bears," plead Crockett, very loth to forego the pleasure of picking off the noble game.

"He meant every thing ; he meant that you mustn't make the least noise to bring the Comanches down upon us, and *you mustn't do it !*"

By this time the bear had disappeared around the house, and the hunter reluctantly lowered his piece.

"Would thar be any harm," he asked, entreatingly, "in me slipping after the critter, and chasing him away off in the woods, and then dropping him ?"

"And leaving me alone ?"

"Ah, me !" sighed Crockett, "I s'pose you're right, but b'ars is my weakness, and when I see one, thar's such an itching in my hands, that it's mighty hard work to keep still, but I'll stick to you, till we get out of this muss."

He asked as a boon, however, that she would consent to his standing where he was so as to *look* at the bear, if he should put in an appearance again.

) Katrina could not well refuse this, but she took good care to remain with him, for after what she had witnessed, it was plain that he could not be trusted, in the matter of bears.

Crockett stood faithful at his post for half an hour, carefully scanning the clearing, forgetful of the absent Bungslager, and Sebastian, and of his own danger, and intent only upon seeing the animal which he had hunted with so much zest in the years past in the wilds of his own Tennessee.

But nothing more of the huge creature was seen, and turning disappointedly away, he and Katrina walked back in the

wood, resumed their seats, and awaited the coming of the young Texan.

About an hour had passed, and they were beginning to feel some solicitude for the safety of the Texan himself, when he reappeared as silently as an Indian hunter.

But he was alone.

"Have you learned nothing of him?" inquired the trembling Katrina, hastening to her lover.

"Nothing at all," was the reply, as he took her two hands, and kissed her face. "I went back for nearly a mile, and called to him a dozen times, but heard and saw nothing at all that could give me the least clue to his disappearance."

The poor girl covered her face and gave a wail of despair.

"Did you see nothing of the varmints?" inquired Crockett.

"No; I hardly know what to make of it; I am quite puzzled at the turn affairs have taken."

So were they all, and the question remained:

"What shall we do?"

CHAPTER XIII.

BY THE CREEK.

THE general opinion among the whites was that nothing was to be gained by pushing on toward Brownston, at the present time.

They were now within a few miles of the village, and were pretty well satisfied that they would have to run a regular gauntlet to pass the Comanches. Such a proceeding was not to be thought of so long as it could be avoided.

"It won't do to turn back, nor to go forward, nor to stay here," remarked the young man, after quite a lengthy discussion.

"Isn't there some place, further in the woods," asked Crockett, "where the varmints ain't likely to look for us?"

They were silent a few minutes, and then Katrina suddenly spoke:

"Do you remember that cavern, Sebastian, where we once halted when we went fishing in the canoe?"

"The very spot," exclaimed the Texan, "and we can't be far from it. We will leave our horses here and go to it."

"But tell me," she added, in a low voice, intended for his ears only, "what about Uncle Hans? Is he to be left to perish?"

He turned his face toward her and spoke in the tenderest manner:

"You know, Katrina, that there is nothing in the world that I would refuse to do for you; and you will believe me, when I tell you that nothing in the world can be done for him. We are powerless to aid him in the least."

"But what do *you* think of it?"

"I have a strong belief that he will turn up all right in spite of the bad look it has now. It is painful to you, but it can not be helped."

"You will hear nothing more from me about it," she replied, "so long as other matters command your thoughts."

It was deemed best to unfasten the horses and lead them still deeper into the wood, so as to make certain of their being out of sight of any Indians who might appear in the path or clearing. Then they were fastened to the limbs of trees, so as to prevent their straying, and then, under the leadership of the Texan, they pushed on for the retreat to which reference has been made.

A half-mile or thereabouts brought them the creek beside which the path led for some distance, and then a few hundred yards to the right and the refuge was reached.

Crockett saw an irregular pile of rocks, jutting out over the creek, but no sort of entrance was visible.

Katrina, however, sprung nimbly upon the first boulder and walked rapidly up and over the mass, followed by the others, until she had gone about twenty feet, when she leaped down a distance about equal to her own height, and their destination was reached.

It did not prove to be much of a cavern, but the rocks jutted and lapped over each other in such a way as to make a hollow extending about a half-dozen feet back.

The advantages of this retreat were, first, that it was not

likely to be visited by the Comanches, and in case it was, the occupants were capable of making a successful defense for some time. They could not be injured by fire, and the means of approach prevented any mass swarming into and overwhelming them.

Hunger and thirst were the only effectual agents that could be brought against them, and, under the circumstances, there was not much probability of these being employed.

Accordingly, so far as they were concerned themselves, the three felt warranted in considering themselves perfectly safe.

Then it remained for them to await the withdrawal of the Comanches, which it was possible would occur within twenty-four hours.

As the Texan had remarked, these Indians strike quick, sharp blows, and then vanish in time to avoid the recoil. They own the swiftest mustangs of the south, and are among the finest horsemen in the world.

Their bravery is unquestioned, and the hunters of Texas, at any time, would rather fight a score of Mexicans than a half-dozen of these Comanches.

The whites had scarcely reached their retreat, when they heard the sounds of guns in the direction of the village, proving that fighting was going on there.

The sound of guns was incessant, and now and then the well-known Comanche yells could be distinguished, proving that serious fighting was going on between them and the settlers, who ought to be safe, however, on their own ground.

It was only an illustration of the reckless bravery of these red-men, who were not afraid to be the attacking party, when the odds were against them.

The rattling fire lasted for full an hour, and then the shots became dropping and scattering and the fighting evidently assumed a more desultory character.

As the three whites stood leaning against the wall of rocks behind them, and looking across the moonlit creek into the gloomy woods beyond, they became aware of a gradual lighting up of the sky overhead, with a glare which they soon saw reflected upon the leaves before them.

"Another fire!" exclaimed Sebastian, in an undertone.

"Close by, too," added Crockett.

"What can it be?" asked Katrina.

"It is the building which we saw, and where we were certain there was no danger at all from the Indians," replied the Texan.

"Indeed, our escape has been wonderful," added the astonished girl; "we have been walking and wandering about in the woods, with the Indians on every side of us, and yet not a hair of our heads has been harmed."

"We have been wonderfully protected," responded her lover, "and I only hope the same care will be continued to us."

"But others have not been so fortunate."

"No," said Sebastian, with a sigh, "such a raid as this must always accomplish something. Where there are so many exposed, some of them must fall. More than one house will be rendered desolate by this incursion of the Comanches."

It was on the tongue of Katrina, as the thought of her uncle entered her mind, to say that one home had already been made so; but she recalled the promise made to her lover and held her peace.

By this time the night was more than half gone, and the three began to look for the appearance of day.

The opinion of the Texan was that there would be a good deal of fighting on the morrow, as the Comanches would be likely to scatter in small bands through the country, seeking out the exposed settlers, and wreaking their revenge upon them, for the repulse they were sure to receive at the hands of the villagers.

This day would prove the dangerous one for the fugitives hiding beside the creek.

Through all the hurry and bustle of danger, Crockett had held fast to the bear-skin, which he had stripped from the body of the monster with whom he had such a hard combat upon entering the cabin of Hans Bungslager.

He now spread this upon the rock, as far back as they could penetrate, and invited Katrina to lie down and rest.

Her lover urged her to do the same, but she waited until his blanket was laid upon it, and then she reclined, and owing to her great fatigue almost immediately dropped asleep.

The two men advanced to the outer edge of rocks and sat down to consult a few moments upon the situation, and to speak without restraint regarding the disappearance of Hans Bungslager.

"I feel some hope regarding him," said the Texan, "but I can not call up any *reason* for such a hope."

"I believe he's gone under *sure*," replied Crockett; "they've managed to git him away from us and then knifed him so quick that he hadn't any time to make any noise about it."

"Poor Katrina! it will be a hard blow for her, for she dearly loved her uncle, who as dearly loved her."

"It didn't look much like it, when he come away and forgot her."

"He told the truth when he said he forgot her; he is the most absent-minded man I ever saw. He sometimes forgets where he is, and until I asked him where she was, he had no idea that he had such a thing in the broad world as a niece named Katrina Duncan."

"Perhaps he has wandered away in one of his absent spells."

"It may be, but I hardly believe it."

All this time, while the two were talking, each had been listening to something on the opposite side of the stream.

Neither had made any reference to it, as he wanted to avoid any mistake, but while holding converse, their eyes kept wandering across the stream in quest of the cause of the disturbance.

The disturbance itself was in the shape of a slight rustling of the bushes. At first, it seemed to be caused by the wind; but when it was continued and repeated for several minutes, it was manifest that there was some definite cause for it.

More than one glance had been cast across the creek, but nothing at all was discerned for some time, that could explain what it meant.

Instinctively reading the thoughts of Crockett, the Texan said:

"I guess it's a wild animal."

"I think so; very likely a bear," was the characteristic reply.

"Sh! look!"

At that juncture the dark form of the creature was discerned in the bushes on the other side of the creek.

Crockett caught up his rifle, but the Texan interposed.

"Hold on a minute; do you think that is a bear?"

"I'm sartin of it."

"It looks like a bear," replied young Carsfield, the Texan
"but, *my opinion is that it is a Comanche warrior!*"

CHAPTER XIV.

HANS BUNGSLAGER.

I HAVE spoken of the feeling, or rather conviction, that came over Hans Bungslager that some one or some thing was following him. This conviction became more settled, and when he dismounted on the edge of the clearing not a particle of doubt remained.

He walked forward where Katrina and Crockett were standing, and referred to the annoyance, and then something else coming into his head, he forgot all about it.

Walking back where his horse was standing, he was about to elevate himself to his seat, when he heard a pattering upon the leaves, and looking down the path, saw what appeared to be a huge bear cavorting about fifty rods distant.

"Doonder and blitzen! I dinks dat vos you!" he muttered, the instant he saw the creature, "and I gets you now!"

Rifle in hand, he started on a heavy run, determined to give the audacious brute his *quittus* for his attempts to disturb him.

The bear seemed to take fright at his coming, and danced further away. Several times the Hollander raised his gun, but ere he could make his aim sure, the creature managed to get a tree between him and his foe, who lowered his piece, and, with an exclamation of impatience, hurried forward to get a better position.

This game at bo-peep continued for a long time, and Hans Bungslager was drawn much further away from his friends than he supposed. He was determined to shoot the intruder

when he started, and the oftener he was baffled the more determined did he become.

Once he had the aim exactly, and pulled the trigger with such vigor that he came nigh breaking it, but found he had not raised the hammer, and when he lowered his piece to rectify the error, and raised it again, the aim was lost.

"Dat ish bad as never vas!" growled the angered Dutchman, as he panted forward again, rapidly gaining on the creature.

By and by he was sure of a chance; he saw the bear sitting on his haunches near the path, and resting his rifle on the crotch of a dead limb, he took deliberate aim at the body of the brute.

His dumpy finger was pressing the trigger again, when he discovered that he was aiming at a stump, and the bear was tumbling along a hundred feet in advance.

"Doonderation!" gasped Hans Bungslager, almost dropping his gun in amazement, "dat bear must have shpit dat stump up ag'in."

Nothing daunted, however, he resumed his pursuit, and was gaining quite rapidly on the creature, when he saw something that alarmed him.

In hurrying along the path it was frequently only barely discernible, and then when reaching a place where the moonlight streamed down upon it, it could be distinguished with great distinctness.

On one of these occasions Hans saw the bear run on its hind feet in a style such as no bear in the world could be trained to do, and in just such a posture as a man would take who was tired of running in a stooping position on his hands and knees.

The conclusion was inevitable; he was chasing an Indian disguised as a black bear.

"Doonder and blitzen!" muttered Bungslager, as a cold chill of terror ran through him at the discovery, "dat ish—dat ish—fooney!"

Obtuse and reckless as he was at times, the Hollander had brains enough to perceive the deadly peril into which he had run. The Comanche had adopted this artifice to draw him away from his friends, and to encompass his destruction.

He was in a quandary as to what he should do.

If he kept on his pursuit, one result was inevitable, and if he turned to retreat, following the path back again, the cunning red skin would know that his stratagem had been detected, and he in turn would become pursuer and assailant.

Hans was never a good shot with a rifle, and he was pretty certain that this bear was protected in some such a way that he could not be injured by any rifle however well aimed, so he gave over all thought of injuring the savage by means of his gun.

He could see only one thing that offered any hope, and that was to give the Indian the slip. He was now quite a distance ahead, and still seeking to allure him on. They were entering a part of the wood that looked quite dense and dark, and here Hans resolved to make the effort to get out of an exceedingly bad scrape.

So he followed along, trotting in his elephantine style, and to carry out the illusion, he called out:

"Hold on, you pig coward bears; I got you now, and I shoots you sure, in one minnit."

The bear, somewhat alarmed, trotted so rapidly ahead that it was nearly lost to view in the darkness.

Now was his time.

Dropping as suddenly as if he was shot, he crawled on all fours, as rapidly as his bulky form would admit, until he had gone something like a hundred feet, when, panting and tired, he paused and listened.

The darkness around him was too great for him to see any thing of the "bear," but the sound of a faint, muffled whoop told him that he had been none too soon in his movement, and his foe was signaling to some confederate, and they were both endeavoring to remedy the slip upon their part.

"Yaw; lets 'em look!" chuckled Hans. "I dinks dey won't find me purty soon as never vos."

Waiting until he was thoroughly rested and could hear no more, he arose to his feet, and resumed his flight, taking good care to continue on in the direction upon which he had started, and going further and further away from the dangerous vicinity of his enemy, who had shown so much ingenuity in endeavoring to draw him on to his own destruction.

So far as he could do so, Hans Bungslager advanced without making any noise, for he knew how sharp the sense of hearing was upon the part of the Indians. He plodded along in this manner, for the better part of an hour, when his further progress was checked by his coming upon the bank of the creek, to which I have made frequent reference.

Here he paused in a quandary.

"I dink I kin wades across dat," he mused, as he surveyed the calmly flowing stream, "and den I gits on de oder side, and den I dinks I ought to be on dis side, so I won't stay here nor goes to de oder side."

This perhaps was a sage conclusion, but rather difficult of fulfillment. Very naturally he felt safer upon the other bank of the creek, further away from the plotting Indians: but he was well aware that the stream was quite deep in some places.

He stood undecided some minutes, and then the point was settled by hearing the report of a gun at no great distance behind him.

"Doonder!" he exclaimed with a start, "mebbe dey shoots dat at me! I dink I leaf!"

Anxious as he was to advance, and warm as was the summer night, he preferred to reach the other shore in dry clothes; so he sat down upon the bank and carefully removed his shoes and pants, and tying them into a bundle, slung them over the barrel of his rifle, which rested over his shoulder, and then ventured into the stream.

"Dish ish nice," he murmured, as the cool water crept up about his bulky calves, "dish ain't deep."

Step by step he felt his way along, until he had reached the center of the stream, where the water was not more than eighteen inches.

"Dish ish bettrish goot," he continued, "dish ish de way to cross de brooks. I dinks dat I alway does—"

Despite his care, at this juncture he went into a hole, up to his neck. As he sunk down, he gasped:

"Oo—oo!"

At the same time, he threw up both arms with such an involuntary suddenness that the bundle dropped from his gun and began floating away from him.

"Doonder and blitzen!" he exclaimed, and she plunged after it, still grasping his gun, with a vice-like grip.

He managed to secure the bundle just as it was sinking, but it was only a partial success. The indispensables remained in his hands, but the shoes, with the carefully knit stockings wadded in them, vanished from his view.

He groped around in the water some time for them, but they were not to be found, and not a little disappointed, he made his way to land, narrowly escaping a total submergence ere he succeeded.

He concluded that this way of crossing was not without its disadvantages, and he was not clear in his mind that he could recommend its adoption to his friends.

But, Hans was a sort of philosopher, and donning his pants, put himself in the best condition possible.

At this juncture it occurred to him that perhaps Katrina would be somewhat concerned at his absence, and he regretted that he had not made known his intention before he started in pursuit of his bear.

He debated the matter awhile, but saw no practical way of remedying the matter, and resolved to give it no further attention.

Child-like, he still felt the desire to keep moving, under the impression that he was getting further and further away from his peril.

He had not accomplished any considerable distance, when he found that he was unequal to the task of what would have been but sport in his boyhood. He was not walking upon a carpet, nor anything like it. In the darkness he could not pick his way, and the part of prudence was for him to stop.

"I dinks I takes a nap, and shtarts when de morning comes to-morrow," he murmured, as he selected a suitable spot and stretched himself upon the ground, where, for the present, I leave him, sleeping the sleep of innocence and health.

CHAPTER XV.

THE COMANCHE BEAR.

THE declaration of Sebastian Carsfield that the object seen by him and Crockett across the creek, instead of being a bear, was an Indian gotten up in that shape, let in a flood of light upon both.

"I wouldn't shoot!" added the Texan; "let us go back, where he can't hit us, and we will watch it."

They carefully withdrew a few paces, and lying down flat upon the rock, peered over at the suspicious object.

They discovered little or nothing more. The dark huge figure of the animal was seen for a few minutes, groping around in the undergrowth, when it took itself off and did not come back.

"That's the bear I see'd on the clearin'," remarked Crockett; "and that Katrina wouldn't let me shoot."

"Yes; it would have been a good thing if you could have put a ball through it. I think it has been by some such means that Hans Bungslager has been led on into the woods to his own destruction.

The night was so clear and still that the two men, almost unconsciously, fell asleep, as they lay stretched out upon the rock.

The hours passed on, and when it began to grow light, Katrina awoke and advanced to the front of the cavern, and paused beside the two men stretched out there.

Both were sleeping soundly, and she looked at them for a few minutes with feelings of commiseration.

"They are tired out and wearied," she murmured; "they will need sleep, and I will let them be until I return."

Very carefully she came down from among the rocks, and advancing to the edge of the creek bathed herself in it. The water was so cool and refreshing that she plashed her hands in it for several minutes.

No thought of danger entered her head, as she believed the

place so secluded that there was scarcely a possibility of their being disturbed by the foes they dreaded so much. Had she known what her friends had seen during the previous night, she would have been more careful in her movements.

She was about a hundred yards from where the men were sleeping, and sat down on the mossy bank of the stream for a few minutes to enjoy a slight breeze that was fanning her face and that made music among the rustling leaves.

The sky was clear, and the sunlight penetrated the wood with its revivifying influence; but for the disappearance of her uncle she would have been in the best of spirits. The cabin had been swept away, but she and the two men had escaped with their lives, and to her, it seemed that scarcely any danger had passed.

She had sat thus some ten minutes or thereabouts, when a crackling of the bushes across the stream caused her to raise her head, and she caught sight of what appeared to be a large black bear.

It was only a partial glimpse that she obtained, and the animal seemed to be going away from her further into the wood.

"I guess he hasn't seen me," she concluded, as something warned her that she had already remained away from the cavern too long.

So she concluded to wait a few minutes longer, as she felt a reluctance to awake the hunters, who so badly needed sleep.

A short time after, she heard a ripple in the water above her, and she looked up-stream, but saw nothing.

For the reason she was a moment too late. Had she been a little more prompt, she would have detected that same "Comanche bear," carefully wading across the creek, and using his hind legs in such a manner that he stood upright like a man.

Katrina was unusually short-sighted to-day. Even when the water in front of her flowed by dark and discolored, she failed to take warning, and sat some time longer in a sort of dreamy reverie, hardly conscious of what was going on about her.

But after awhile she roused herself to her situation and with a sigh rose to her feet, and started on her return.

Her senses were now on the alert, and so, when she had taken a dozen steps or so, she caught a glimpse of the bear, she had seen some time before, and it was now directly between her and the rocks she was seeking to reach.

This was bad, as she still had no gun in hand, and could not therefore defend herself if attacked.

The manner of the brute seemed to indicate that he was not aware of her proximity, and she leaped lightly behind a tree for the purpose of concealing herself.

She stood thus some ten minutes, debating whether she should call to Carsfield or Crockett, or wait until they should awake themselves, or the bear should withdraw.

It looked as if the latter were about to be the case, as the bear seemed to be browsing around in an aimless way, constantly on the move, and therefore he would be likely soon to move far enough to one side to permit her to reach her refuge.

For this she waited, now and then growing impatient at the tardy movements of the bear. The latter was constantly stirring about, but somehow or other, it appeared to be back and forth, between her and the rocks, and never once so much to one side, as to tempt her to make the effort.

Furthermore, Katrina could not shut her eyes to the fact, that the brute was gradually approaching her.

This, in the course of a few minutes became so apparent, that the girl felt that her situation was becoming critical. A terror of alarm shook her frame, and she was on the point of uttering a call to her lover, when the bear shied off to one side so much as to give her the "opening," so ardently desired.

Katrina stood trembling and hesitating for a moment, and then with one ejaculated prayer, started like a fawn for the rocks.

She did not look to the right nor left, but she had scarcely started, when she became aware that the bear had risen on his hind feet and was seeking to intercept her.

Faster she ran, until she seemed to fly over the ground, but the bear was more fleet of foot than she, and scarcely a dozen steps had elapsed, when it became certain that she was to be intercepted by her enemy.

Then Katrina turned her affrighted gaze upon her foe, and instead of a bear saw a Comanche warrior, with a bear-skin

thrown over his shoulder, and its frightful head upon top of his own, directly in front of her.

Still she sought to escape him; but the next instant his brawny arm was thrown around her, and as he turned to flee with his captive, her terrified scream rung through the woods and she swooned away.

CHAPTER XVI.

COLONEL CROCKETT'S LAST BEAR-HUNT.

"SURELY I heard some one call me," muttered Sebastian Carsfield, the Texan, as he roused himself up and rubbed his eyes. "What does this mean? Crockett and I have both been asleep. What a warning to a sentinel not to lie down or give way to drowsiness. But was that voice a dream or a reality—"

He turned his head and saw that Katrina was gone.

With a dreadful, chilling horror at his breast, he sprung to his feet, looked around and called out, *Katrina!* KATRINA! KATRINA!"

That voice penetrated far through the woods and reached the ears of her who was being carried so swiftly away in the grasp of the painted Comanche. She sought to reply, but the brute checked her utterance, and the shrieks died out into a gasping sob.

"What's up now?" demanded Crockett, awakened by the tumult of his comrade.

"God knows what's become of Katrina," was the despairing reply; "she has vanished, gone or been stolen."

"Maybe she's somewhere about," replied the Tennessean, rousing himself.

"No; I am sure it was her calling to me that awoke me a few minutes ago."

"Then we oughter be on the move," added Crockett, leaping to his feet. "What direction did it come from?"

"Coming to me in my sleep, I can hardly tell; but it strikes me that it was from off yonder."

Crockett, led by some indefinable impulse, snatched up the bear-skin, and with it over his arm, sprung down from among the rocks into the woods below.

"We must take the trail," he added to the Texan, who had already discovered it on the ground, and answered:

"There it is, leading toward the creek. She has gone there to bathe herself."

A few moments sufficed to take them to the spot, where she had spent a half-hour or so, early in the morning, and then they observed the circuitous route back again, which suggested that she had discovered or was seeking to avoid some danger.

There was no difficulty in tracing the footsteps to the point where the Comanche bear had seized and borne her away. The prints on the ground perplexed them for a few minutes.

"They were made by an Indian without a doubt," said the Texan.

"And that Indian," said Crockett, "was the bear that we saw last night on t'other side of the creek."

"That's it! that's it!" fairly gasped young Carsfield; "it's their old tricks over again. He can't be far away anyhow, and we will run him into the ground before he can reach his confederates."

The Tennessean was satisfied that this was the true course, and the two started forward at once, the trail over the dead and rumpled leaves being such that it was easily followed.

"He is running very fast," added Sebastian, when they had progressed something like a hundred yards upon their way.

"But he can't carry the gal and outrun us besides."

"He'll make her do her own running after awhile."

"Is she good on the jump?" inquired Crockett.

"She runs very swiftly," said the lover, "and you may be sure that dog will make her do her best."

"It strikes me that them varmints are tryin' to take prisoners, instead of raisin' the ha'r of the settlers through these parts."

"That's it," was the reply, uttered on the run.

Such indeed seemed to be the case, when the past actions of the Comanches were considered, for, it can be seen that more than once they had it in their power to pick off the

whites by deathly shot from the wood, but had refrained, and resorted to strategy to secure them.

Hans Bungslager had been "operated" upon in this way, and had only escaped through a providential gleam of prudence that flashed through his brain at the right moment.

The trail followed by the Texan and Tennessean, for a long distance, went straight forward into the woods, as though aiming at no particular point, but seeking to get as far away from pursuit as was possible.

They were still following hard after the abductor, when they crossed the path leading to Brownston, and over which they had passed a few hours before.

They paused an instant, looking to the right and left, but nothing was to be seen, and the trail of the flying Indian was seen to cross the path at right-angles.

"That is encouraging," exclaimed Sebastian.

"Why?" asked his companion.

"It looks as if he were going it alone, instead of hunting up his companions."

"Don't be sartin of that. He ain't an Injin, if he don't know what place his nose is p'intin' at, and he'll find some other scamps afore long to help him."

Crockett proved right in this instance, for they had gone but a short distance further, when they came in sight of the camp-fire. Their skill in trail-hunting was not sufficient for them to make certain of the time that had elapsed since the passing of the Comanche and his prize; but they knew they could not be very far behind the scamp, and they kept their eyes on the look-out that they did not run blindly into any danger.

So they detected the faint curling smoke on the bank of a small stream in time to prevent exposing themselves, and they made a careful reconnoissance.

Four Comanche Indians were seated around a small fire, every one smoking. The smell of cooking food was in the air, showing that they had finished a good breakfast. Around them were scattered the contents of several feather-beds, linen, calico and clothing, attesting very plainly that they had "gone through" somebody's establishment in a most effective manner.

Upon a heap of blankets sat Katrina Duncan, her face covered and her head bent in despair. The Indians were eagerly discussing some matter, and paid no attention to their helpless captive.

The Texan and Tennessean withdrew a few paces to consult as to what they should do. As there were five of their foes, it was hardly practicable to make an attack upon them. From their concealment, the whites could pick off two. The course of the other three in all probability then would be to kill Katrina as quick as a flash, so as to prevent the possibility of her rescue, and then to turn and attack the two whites, with a very good prospect of finishing them off in the same manner; for no living Indians can out-dodge, out-shoot or out-wit, or out-fight these same Comanches of the South-west. With an odd man, they would be certain to get into the rear of the whites, and when that was done, it would be a long and last good-by to them.

"I don't see the bear," remarked Carsfield; "he may have thrown off the skin, but I was unable to see it upon the ground."

"He's gone back, thinkin' we're at the rocks, to try and fool us."

Carsfield was strongly inclined to believe this.

"Where is Bungslager?"

"That is hard to tell," said Crockett; "we can think only of *her* at present."

The Texan turned suddenly upon his companion.

"See here, you have a bear-skin with you; isn't it possible for you to play the bear too?"

Colonel Crockett took at once.

"I'll do it."

And straightway he began arraying himself in the costume of the animal. He succeeded in making quite a resemblance, but when it was finished both saw that the thing could not be done during daylight.

The only way by which they could hope to succeed was by Crockett actually *taking the place of* the Comanche who had been playing the part of bear. Any critical scrutiny of the counterfeit by the Indians would be certain to result in their detection of the trick. If they could be made to be

lieve that Crockett was their own comrade frolicking about the camp, they would not be apt to bestow much attention upon him. Still, as it was certain that the trick would be discovered sooner or later, it was all-important that they should have the darkness of night in which to work.

Accordingly the two withdrew to a safe distance, and the Texan went on a little foraging expedition of his own, managing to secure enough food for present purposes.

One or two of the Comanches was constantly going and coming, and they kept the Indians under surveillance. Katrina was furnished with food, but the camp was not broken and it was evident they intended to spend the night where they were.

Late in the afternoon the "Comanche Bear" walked into camp, carrying his hide thrown over his shoulder. He remained for an hour or two and then departed, and, as it was now fully dark, Crockett prepared to venture upon his dangerous experiment.

Young Carsfield approached as near the camp as prudent, and then Crockett went sidling and galloping toward it, approaching gradually, and yet concealing his identity as much as possible.

When he came within the circle of light, all five of the Indians looked at him, and then paid no further heed, evidently believing it to be their comrade, practicing to improve himself.

Nearer and nearer he approached the spot where Katrina was sitting, she looking at him with a look of terror, as if uncertain whether he was watching her or not. This was what Crockett wished, and he managed, unseen by the Indians, to give her a sign which put her on her guard.

One of the Comanches looked suspiciously at him, but he advanced until he was within a few feet of Katrina, when he called out to her in a husky whisper:

"Now run, right by me!"

Having no thought of any such thing, her captors had not bound her, and the girl darted off like a deer, leaping directly by Crockett, who immediately followed hard after her.

It looked as if she had started in affright at the approach of the bear, and all ought to have gone well, had not the genuine

Comanche bear, at this critical moment, put in an appearance.

This exposed the whole thing, and in an instant the Indians were on their feet, in full pursuit, with their tricky companion at their head.

But Katrina had gained a good start, and had scarcely entered the real gloom of the wood when her lover was beside her, holding her hand, and they fled with all the speed at their command.

A few sharp turns, and they got beyond all danger; but the Comanche who had played the part of bruin, followed so hard after Crockett that he could not elude him.

"*Wal, if I must, I must!*" muttered the Tennessean, drawing his fearful Bowie and turning upon the red-skin.

The contest was over in a second almost. As the Indian sunk before the fearful knife, Crockett was just in time to turn and elude the others, who were coming up with much rapidity.

He had a hard time of it, and but for the shelter of the wood, would not have succeeded in getting away; but he soon ceased from his great exertions, and after an hour's cautious signaling managed to rejoin the lovers, remarking, as he related his experience:

"Somehow or other I sorter feel this is the last b'ar-hunt I'll ever take a hand in!"

They endeavored to laugh at his depression, and he purposely changed the conversation, as he wished to cast no gloom over their happiness.

It was now deemed best to approach as near Brownston as possible, so as to be ready to enter the village, if it could be done, early in the morning.

They accordingly resumed their cautious way through the woods, but had not gone far when they heard approaching footsteps.

The whites instantly halted, and the two men grasped their rifles, ready for friend or foe.

"Doonder and blitzen! I's been valkin' ever sin' to-morrow mornin', and I ain't so fur off te village as I would be yesterday ef I had started next week!"

It was Hans, and the next minute all three were around

him, grasping his hands, Katrina weeping and embracing him, and all demanding what it meant.

He explained, in his characteristic way, what had happened to him since his separation, and adding that he was nearly famished with hunger; but as there was no means of relieving him, the journey was continued until they were in sight of the gleaming lights of the settlement.

As a careful reconnoissance failed to discover any thing of the Comanches, they moved on and entered Brownston, where they learned that the marauding Indians had taken their departure during the afternoon, and the memorable raid was ended.

A few days later, Crockett and his friends, who were awaiting his return in the village, started for the Alamo, where, as it is well known, this extraordinary man was inhumanly killed, with the remnant of the garrison who had surrendered to the perfidious Santa Anna.

The little cottage at Brownston became the home of Katrina Duncan when she married the gallant Sebastian Carsfield, after the independence of Texas was acknowledged by Mexico.

Hans Bungslager had a comfortable little sum stowed away where no Comanches could lay their hands upon it, and with this he rebuilt his cabin, bought a new cow, and he and his frow spent many days together upon the same ground that had been the witness of so many fearful scenes in their history.

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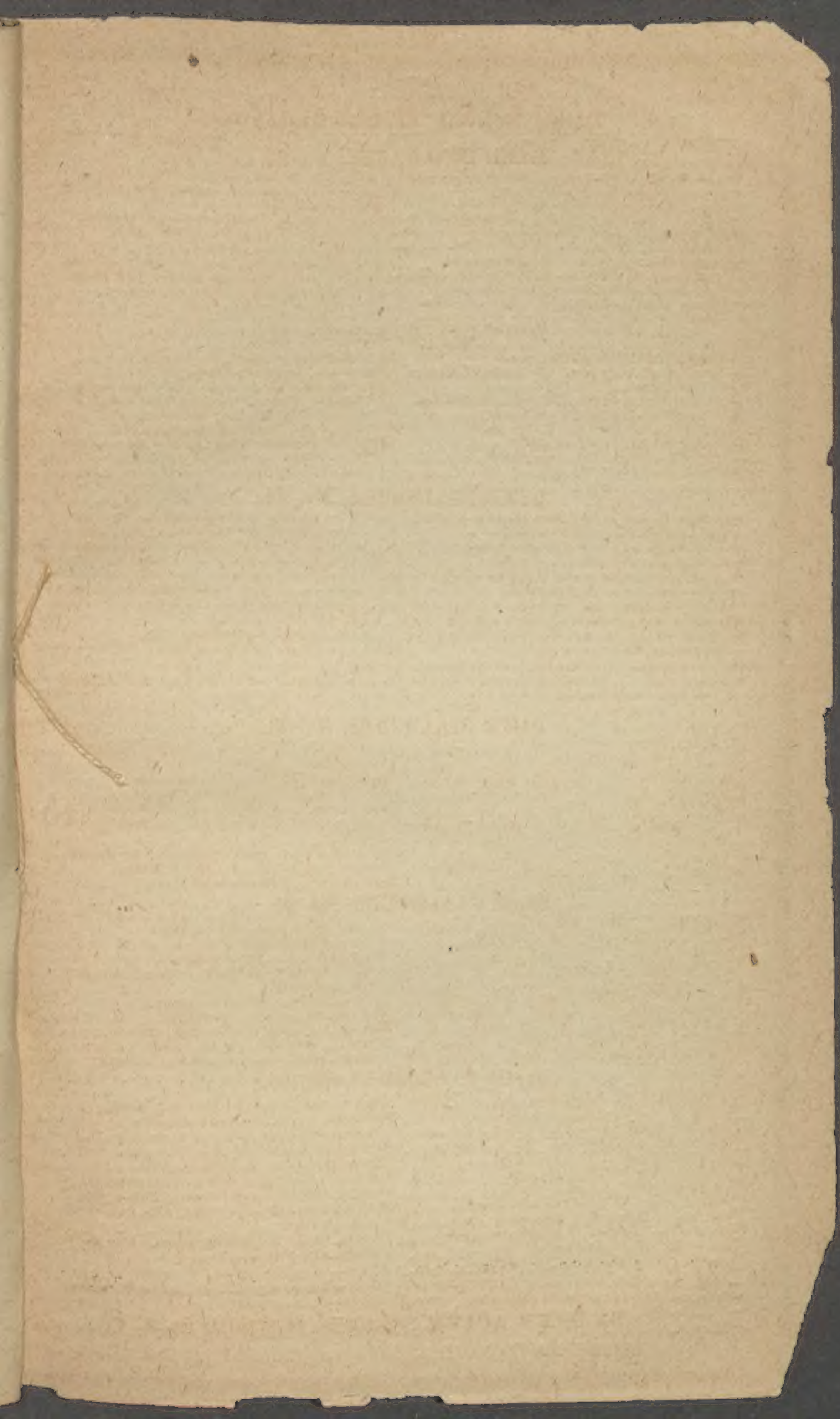
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